

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
3rd, 4th & 5th Grade Reading Curriculum 2007-2008
DRAFT



Overview of the 3rd, 4th & 5th Grade Reading Curriculum Calendar

Towards the end of every school year, the teachers, school leaders and staff developers who comprise the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project reflect on the insights gleaned from our experiences with the preceding year's curricular calendar. We recall the research and study in which we've been engaged, consider lessons learned from interim and high stakes assessments, and set forth a newly revised curricular calendar for the upcoming year. The curricular calendar that the Project puts forth is especially important because the organization will offer several hundred full-day conferences during the upcoming year that are aligned to this document. Those conference days support K-8 classroom teachers, special education teachers, teachers of ELLs, and administrators in forming communities of practice.

Although we hope and expect that the teachers in schools linked to the Project will study our recommended curricular calendar with great care, we do not expect that you necessarily follow all of the recommendations in this document. We are aware that there are scores of different ways in which a yearlong reading and writing curriculum could unfold for any one grade-level, and that this is just one possible plan. The organization of the Project cannot support every conceivable journey of study, but we encourage you to gather your own sources of information, tap into your own passions and interests, and devise a plan which incorporates and also adapts the collective wisdom in this document.

This calendar is similar to last year's, but puts a special emphasis on assessment-based instruction. In each unit, the teacher needs to determine the specific reading skills he or she has decided to highlight, and then the teacher must design instruction that moves students along a developmental trajectory within that skill.

This year's curricular calendar also places greater emphasis on narrative as well as expository nonfiction reading. The units of study also rely more on touchstone texts—these are important in reading, not just in writing. You will also see special attention paid to helping students reflect on their own strategies, and on helping them develop identities and interdependence as readers.

This curriculum assumes that above all, a unit of study in reading must do no harm to readers! That is, above all, the unit of study must not get in the way of children having opportunities to read everyday for long stretches of time—at the very least for

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40 minutes in school, and almost as much time at home—and to read with engagement, fluency, accuracy and meaning.

The curriculum also assumes that children profit from direct and explicit instruction in the goals (skills) of proficient reading, and in the specific step-by-step strategies that readers often use in order to achieve those goals, those skills. Units of study are designed to teach reading skills, especially including word solving, monitoring for sense, close reading, prediction, envisionment, inference, personal response, interpretation, determining importance, critical reading, and intertextuality.

Although a unit of study might bear the title “Historical Fiction Book Clubs,” for example, the principal goal of that unit would certainly *not* be to teach the characteristics of historical fiction! Nor is the real goal of such a unit to teach the specific challenges of reading historical fiction. Instead, the teacher designing the study will fashion general reading goals for that unit and for every unit. Although he or she may draw on the reading opportunities offered by historical fiction books, the teacher would first and foremost design instruction to take children’s general reading abilities further. Whereas one teacher teaching such a unit might, based on assessment of his or her readers, aim to teach children to envision the world of a story (drawing on both a close reading of the text and on the reader’s personal and prior knowledge) another teacher might develop a unit that responds to the class’ need for intertextuality, helping children cross reference both fictional and nonfictional texts pertaining to a specific time and place in history.

Assessment

Tools for Assessment

Assessing reading is enormously complex. Reading is every bit as rich, multilayered and invisible as thinking itself. And anyone who aspires to separate one strand of reading from all the rest, then labels and measures that one strand or aspect of reading must approach this effort with proper humility.

No number, no label, no indicator is adequate for the task. Still, as responsible people, teachers need to assess children’s reading in ways that give them as full a view as possible. In the upcoming year New York City teachers will have no alternative but to use a formal tool to assess each child’s reading, tracking the child’s progress along standards-based indicators, and sending the results of those assessments home at regular intervals throughout the year. For New York City teachers, then, the question is not whether to do this, but simply, how to do it.

We recommend that teachers use multiple measures to assess reading development, and that these measures, at the very least, track students’ progress along four dimensions: 1) Volume, 2) Accuracy and basic comprehension along a gradient of increasingly difficult texts, 3) Higher-level comprehension and, when relevant, 4) the child’s first language literacy.

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The TCRWP, working in connection with empowerment schools, has developed a formal tool for tracking students' progress in reading, and we strongly recommend that schools use either the tool we have developed (which has been approved by the DOE and is available to anyone wanting to use it) or use the DRA, QRI, or a similar tool. The tools the Project has developed for assessing readers are discussed briefly here. People wanting more information on TCRWP's assessment tools can find it here: <http://rwproject.tc.columbia.edu/assessment/>.

Each Child Across a School Maintains a Log Recording the Amount of Reading Done—in Time and Pages—Each Day, in School and At Home

We recommend that schools establish and implement policies so that each child in the school (grades 2-8) maintain a daily record of the books he or she reads in school and at home. This log must contain the title, author, the level of difficulty (as in, for example, Level P.), the numbers of minutes the child spent reading, and the starting and ending page number. Some people question whether it is necessary to include the level of difficulty (when it is available.) Our response is that this information provides the teacher with vitally important information—information which exponentially increases the usefulness of the tool. For example, if a child devotes a week to reading *The Stolen Pony*, a teacher may conclude little from this. But if we know that book is level M (the level of *Magic Treehouse* books), then we know that the child has done an alarmingly small amount of reading during that week. On the other hand, if the book is level Z (books at that level tend to require much more time,) then we would draw a different conclusion.

These logs are not places for responses to reading, nor do children write book summaries in them. You may ask, “How can a teacher be sure that the log accurately reflects the reading that the child has done?”

We suggest that every day during reading time, every child should always have his or her log out on the table. The first thing the child does at the start of reading is to enter the starting time and page number, the last thing the child does before moving from reading to talking is to enter the ending time and page number. We also encourage teachers to often refer to logs in reading conferences: “I see you have been reading this book especially slowly. Look, you galloped through that last book—why is this one progressing so differently for you?” “You seem to be skipping between books a bunch lately—why do you think it has been hard for you to stay engrossed in one book?” “I notice this book is easier than the ones you have been reading—do you find your reading process is different now, when you are reading a lighter text?”

We also suggest that teachers regularly ask children to work analytically with their logs, talking with partners or writing about changes in the average number of pages read. Children can also notice the genre choices made across time and the relationship between genres or levels and volume. They can discuss patterns seen by studying the time they spend reading at-home as well.

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School leaders, as well as teachers, must collect, save and study these critical records. For example:

- A general rule of thumb is that a child reading texts at any level of difficulty should usually be able to read approximately 3/4 page a minute. (This rule of thumb works because generally, as the pages become denser, the reader's abilities also becoming stronger.) A teacher and/or a principal will want to take notice if a child seems to be reading a book at a dramatically slower rate. For example, alarms should go off if a child reads 8 pages in 30 minutes. Why is the child not reading closer to 24 pages in that length of time? There may, of course, be good reasons.
- If a child reads an amount—say, 34 pages during a half hour in school, then brings that same book home and claims to read a much smaller amount—say, 8 pages within half an hour of reading time at home, alarms again should go off. Is the child actually making enough time for reading at home?
- If you suggest the child reads books which are Level T, and she instead reads many books which are far easier, this discrepancy also needs to promote further research. Perhaps the easier books are nonfiction texts, and the child has wisely sought out books she can read with meaning. Perhaps the child recently completed a very taxing book and wants some easier reads. Then too, perhaps the child simply can't find other books that are a bit more challenging, and needs your help finding books that are "just right" for her.
- When teachers convey information to parents, it is crucial to let parents know if the volume of reading their child is doing is high, fairly high, quite low, or very low. The wonderful thing about this information is that parents can do something about it...and progress on this one front will have enormous pay off for every aspect of the child's reading development.

Teachers Track the Changing Levels of Text Difficulty that a Child Can Handle Across Time

All of us know the joy of finding a book which is "just-right" for us. When we are well matched to a book, reading can be one of life's greatest joys...and on the other hand, when a book is "all-wrong" instead of "just-right" for us, reading can feel interminable, humiliating, and tedious. There will never be a single litmus paper test which can accurately match a child to books, but as teachers, we can make some progress towards this goal if we provide each child with four things: 1) the opportunity to choose books that he or she wants to read, 2) a community of other readers who promote and summarize and talk about books with enthusiasm, 3) books that are easy enough for the reader that he or she will be given lots of opportunities for high-success reading and 4) encouragement to occasionally read a text which is just a little challenging, and the scaffolding to make the experience fruitful.

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Among other things, then, teachers need a means for determining the level of text difficulty that each student can handle. We recommend teachers use either the DRA, the QRI, or a similar tool that the Project has developed to determine the text-level at which each student can read with success. The tool the Project has developed contains two passages at each text-level (A-Z), ranging in length from 20-400 plus words, followed by literal and inferential comprehension questions for each passage. Level A-K readers read books from a series referred to as Be-bop Books, reading these out loud to teachers, who record reading behavior and miscues. For level L-Z readers, a teacher uses available data to estimate each child's reading level, then asks the child to read aloud from one of two passages at that level. Teachers record miscues for 100 words; if the child reads with 95-100% accuracy, then the child reads the remainder of the passage silently and then answers questions (hopefully answering at least 3 of the 4 questions correctly). Through this somewhat crude sort of assessment, a teacher can ascertain the general level of text-difficulty that a child is able to read with ease and comprehension. The truth is that using a short passage in order to ascertain whether a child can read, say, an S or a T level text is not perfect, and it is also true that children can generally handle a band of texts (say S/T). Some teachers may decide to cluster text-levels so that books bear double-levels such as "S/T" and children are assessed into these broader bands. We find more teachers prefer to differentiate because this makes it more likely that children find themselves making tangible progress within shorter lengths of time. Teachers must reassess periodically (formally as well as informally) and track each child's progress across the year. It is crucial that teachers across the school keep records of the books a child has read, and of each child's progress along gradients of difficulty in books. Obviously teachers need to pass the records from one to another.

When a third, fourth or fifth grade student is progressing well, he or she is apt to move along three levels a year (although once readers are reading Level R or beyond, they often progress more slowly, perhaps moving up one level a year). This does not mean teachers should move children along regardless of their abilities to read harder texts with accuracy and comprehension—they should not—but the rule of thumb can help people gauge progress. When a child is not progressing at the expected pace, he or she will profit from extra attention. In order to stay vigilant, many schools institute a way to track each child's reading level across time. If a child is not progressing, it is crucial to check the volume of reading that child is doing. Usually these children are not actually reading (eyes-on-print reading) for anything close to 2 hours a day, 7 days a week. This is the volume necessary for a child to maintain even just one year's reading growth. (See Gentry, discussed later.)

As mentioned earlier, during 2007-2008, New York City teachers have been asked to not only track each child's progress in reading, but also to send this information home to parents at frequent intervals. Most TCRWP schools will decide that rather than sending home scores earned on standardized-test-like-papers, the school will instead send letters home to parents that convey the volume of reading a child is doing (is this high volume, fairly high, quite low, or very low) and they will also let parents know the child's level of text difficulty. For example, last year's letters included passages

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such as this: “*In November of Grade 3, students should be reading a **level M** text with accuracy, fluency, and comprehension. Your child is currently reading a level _____ text. As such, your child’s grade in reading is a _____.*” Teachers or principals interested in reading about this in more detail can inquire about sample letters.

In the upcoming months, the TCRWP will research and develop ways for teachers to assess the text difficulty that speakers of languages other than English can handle when reading in their first language. It is important that this information, as well as information about the child’s abilities to read English, is sent home to parents and used to develop instructional plans for the child. Children with well developed literacy in their first language need to read books at that complex level of difficulty, while also developing new muscles with reading English.

Assessing Higher Level Comprehension

Of course, reading well involves not only reading with accuracy, it also involves reading with empathy, insight, imagination, synthesis, and knowledge. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project strongly recommends, therefore, that a school devise ways to assess a child’s higher level comprehension.

To help teachers do this, the Project has begun to develop a tool we recommend using and adapting. We have inserted questions such as, “What do you think will happen next?” into the text of several stories, written at Levels K, R, and V. We give a child a story that he or she can read, and then ask the child to read it, writing into spaces within the story in response to the questions. Each question has been designed to reveal the child’s work within a different reading skill—one question asks the reader to predict what will happen next, another asks for envisionment, a third for interpretation and so forth. Because hundreds of readers have now read this same story and responded to these same questions, the Project has developed a scale for less-developed and more-developed work in response to each of these questions. Teachers can now look at their own students’ work with, say, the prediction question in one of these stories, and can assess where in a continuum of work that particular student seems to be in his or her ability to predict. Equally important though, the tool clarifies exactly what it means to predict very well and contains examples of work that strong (and weak) predictors do. Similar scales have been developed to assess a collection of different reading skills.

We also encourage teachers to help each child develop a reading portfolio, keeping evidence of the thinking work that a child does as he or she reads. For example, on any given day a teacher could pause in the midst of a read aloud and ask children, “What are your theories about the characters in this story?” The children’s stop-and-jots can then be contrasted with each other’s, and this analysis of children’s thinking can help a teacher see children who are less and more developed in a particular way of thinking about a text. Then too, children can come to look at their own work, to understand what it is *they* tend to do as readers, to locate others whose work can function as a horizon, and to set concrete goals for themselves.

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Finally, we have selected a few levels as Landmark Levels, and when a child feels strong at any one of these particular levels we will ask that child to read a Landmark Book and to do independent work in response to that book. For example, when a child feels that he or she is a strong Level M reader, we will ask that child to read and respond to *The Best, Worst Day*, by Bonnie Graves. We have guidelines for this work, and are collecting evidence to learn what different children (unfinished sentence?). This way, any one child and his or her parents or care-takers can look at the child's responses to reading in relation to work done by other readers, reading this same book.

Practical Help Assessing Children at the Start of the School Year

Years ago, the Project suggested that a teacher start the year by putting crates of mixed-level texts at the center of each table, then asking kids to graze through those crates, reading whatever appealed to them while the teacher circled quickly about the room, assessing. Once a child was assessed, the teacher would give that reader a magazine-box for his or her books. This child would no longer read from the mixed-level bin but would, instead, choose a few just-right, leveled books at a time, storing the short-stack in his or her private bin. Visitors to the room in mid-September could see at a glance the percentage of kids who had been launched into just-right reading—the aim was to get everyone to this point within two weeks from the start of school.

Once the entire school has been working to match readers to books for a year or two, however, there will no longer be any need for a teacher to begin the year with children in the holding pattern of reading through a random collection of books from a crate at the center of the table. Instead, each teacher's class roster will convey the level of just-right book that each child was reading at the end of the previous school year. Ideally, children will also keep logs of the books they read during the summer, so teachers can estimate whether the child's reading progressed or took a dive during those crucial months. If a child did not read over the summer, that child will lose ground and so a teacher who ascertains from the summer log that a particular child only read a few books will then move this child back a level or two from where the child ended the previous school year. Similarly, a teacher can move a child forward if he or she did a lot of just-right reading during the summer. In this way, teachers can rely on reading records to start the year off with each child reading from a short stack of appropriate books.

Of course, the fact that you start children reading books you've been told will be just-right for them does not mean you won't assess their reading; you will. But this assessment can be woven into your reading workshop once it is going full-swing, a week or two from the start of the year.

Obviously your first priority will be to assess any reader who seems to not be actually reading. Watch for signs of disengagement: the head that revolves, the child who is always losing his or her place in a book, the youngster who uses reading time as a chance to get a drink of water or go to the bathroom.

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If you decide to use the TCRWP assessments, to match readers to books, we suggest you call three children over to you at a time, each carrying his or her book. Get one started on the formal assessment. While you listen to his or her reading, the other two can be reading independently. You needn't have the assessed child finish the passage before you ascertain whether it is too hard, and if it is, move to another passage right away. Once one child has read aloud 100 words and you have recorded the child's miscues, he or she can read the rest of the passage silently while you get the second child—who will already be right beside you—started reading aloud to you.

Be Sure Children Are Reading with Volume, Stamina, and Time-on-Task

Keep an eye on each child's reading rate, and on the way this changes across time. Here's a table that shows *targeted* reading rates (words per minute), by grade level:

General Range of Adequate Reading Rates By Grade Level

Grade	WPM	Grade	WPM
1	60-90	6	195-220
2	85-120	7	215-245
3	115-140	8	235-270
4	140-170	9	250-270
5	170-195	12	250-300

Harris and Sipay (1990)

The chart of reading rates (above) can give you a rough idea of the reading rate you hope to see.

Once you know a child's reading rate, and you also know the level of difficulty of the texts the child is reading, this can give you a rough guide to the progress you can expect a child to make in a book. For example, a child who is reading *Stone Fox*, or another Level P book, will generally read at the rate of at least 100 wpm, requiring about four hours. Some children read twice as fast at this level, however, and so the book will require only two hours. Research by Gentry shows that for a child to maintain grade level in reading, he or she must read for two hours a day. This means that if the child is reading content-area texts and magazines half that time, and reads fairly slowly – 100 wpm, *Stone Fox* should still require only three days at the most! This child will read *at least* two such books in a week. Something is drastically wrong if a child lingers over *Stone Fox* for an entire week! A child who reads level R, on the other hand, will be apt to read at 200 wpm and this means the youngster should be able to read *Hatchet* in 8 hours. Similar calculations show that children reading *Horrible Harry* (level L) or *The Magic Tree House* (Level M) should complete those books within half an hour, reading at least two of them a day! The point is that teachers need to keep a vigilant eye on children's progress through books. Reading logs can help do this.

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**How Long Should It Take a Child to Read a Book
According to Their Reading Level?**

Title	Level	approx# of words	Reading rate	# of minutes per book
<i>Henry and Mudge</i> (Rylant)	J	800-1000	100 WPM	10 minutes
<i>Horrible Harry</i> (Kline)	L	4500	100 WPM	45 minutes
			200 WPM	25 minutes
<i>Magic Tree House Series</i> (Osborne)	M	6000	100 WPM	60 minutes
			200 WPM	30 minutes
<i>Henry Series</i> (Cleary)	O	25000	100 WPM	4 hours
			200 WPM	2 hours
<i>Howliday Inn</i> (Howe)	P	30000	100 WPM	5 hours
			200 WPM	2 ½ hours
<i>Stone Fox</i> (Gardiner)**	P	12000	100 WPM	2 hours
			200 WPM	1 hours
<i>Hatchet</i> (Paulsen)**	R	50000	100 WPM	16 hours
			200 WPM	8 hours
<i>Missing May</i> (Rylant)**	W	24500	100 WPM	8 hours
			200 WPM	4 hours

**Allington (2000)

The Components of Balanced Literacy

The term “balanced” literacy comes, in part, from the recognition that readers need a variety of different opportunities to learn. The reading workshop provides children with time to read, with a mentor who is a passionately engaged reader and wears his or her love of reading on the sleeve, with opportunities to talk and sometimes write about reading, and with explicit instruction in the skills and strategies of proficient reading (with an emphasis on reading fiction.) All of this is incredibly important, but alone, it is not sufficient. Children also need the opportunities to learn that can be provided by the other components of balanced literacy.

They need, above all, to write. We assume that the reading workshop, as described in these pages, is balanced by a daily writing workshop, and we assume Teachers College Reading and Writing Project teachers will refer to the curricular calendar for help with writing.

Children also need to study the conventions of written language, including writing with paragraphing, punctuation, and syntactical complexity. Either as part of this or separately, children need time to learn about spelling patterns.

Then, too, Children also need daily opportunities to hear wonderful literature read aloud and frequent opportunities to participate in book talks around the read-aloud text. We expect teachers read aloud several times a day, and lead interactive read

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aloud sessions several times a week. Children also need to study words—both the meaning and the spelling of words.

They need opportunities to read academic texts within content area disciplines, and to receive instruction in reading those texts well.

And children who struggle with fluency (that is, children who read slowly and robotically) need opportunities to participate in shared reading and in repeated oral readings.

Reading Aloud

Reading aloud is crucial even in instances where the teacher does nothing more than read spectacular literature aloud in such a way that children listen with rapt attention, clamoring for more. The pay off for reading aloud becomes even greater when teachers read aloud from a wide range of genre, which generally happens when teachers comb reading aloud into all parts of the day; regarding reading aloud as a terrific resource during science, social studies, math, etc.

The best way to tap into the potential power of reading aloud, however, is to use the read aloud and book talk time as a way to explicitly teach the skills of higher level comprehension. To do this, a teacher first reads the upcoming section of the read aloud book to himself or herself, noticing the mind-work that he or she does while reading. Then the teacher decides whether to use the upcoming read aloud as a means to help children draw upon their full repertoire of reading strategies, or whether to angle the read aloud in such a way as to support the development of a particular comprehension skill. Based on this decision, the teacher decides to demonstrate and then scaffold children in using either one or many skills and strategies.

If the teacher decides, for example, to highlight envisionment, the teacher will insert post-its in a couple places during the first pages of the read aloud, reminding the teacher to pause as he or she reads, to lower the book, and to muse orally. Perhaps the teacher will say--“I’m just picturing this. I can see Artie in the lead, walking down the path in the woods. It’s a narrow path, so Cleo is a few steps behind—there’s just room for one of them. The sun is filtering through the canopy of leaves overhead.” Of course, the teacher’s envisionment could spin on and on and on—it is important to stay brief! After demonstrating in such a manner for 30 seconds, the teacher will be apt to tuck in a comment which names what she has done (“Readers, I don’t really know that the path is narrow—the book hasn’t said that. But I draw on all the forest trails I’ve ever seen, adding details from my own experiences. When I read on, though, sometimes I need to revise my picture. Let’s see.”) Once the teacher has demonstrated whatever the skill may be (in this case, envisioning) a few times, across perhaps three or four pages of the read-aloud, then the teacher is apt to pause in the midst of reading and to scaffold the children in envisioning. (“I can just see the river, can’t you? I’m picturing it—the colors...I’m hearing stuff too, aren’t you?...Use all the rivers you’ve ever stood besides to help you imagine the river.” The teacher might also say, “Remember what we’ve learned earlier in the book, too...”).

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Sometimes these pauses are followed with, “Tell the person beside you what you are seeing, hearing...” and sometimes they lead to the prompt, “Jot what you see, what you hear.” Either injunction can, a moment or two later, be followed with specific tips: “Make sure you are talking/writing in details. Are you using specific words to make your mental movie real?”

Of course, the sequence described above could be altered to show children how to develop theories about characters, how to think across texts, predict, or how to do a host of other reading skills.

If you choose carefully, the read-aloud text can support the independent reading work your students are doing. For example, if the class is engaged in the unit of study on character (and students are thinking about characters as they read independently), you’d be wise to read aloud a chapter book with strong characters who change over the course of the text. This means that the read-aloud book will offer opportunities for deep talk about characters. If, on the other hand, the class is working on nonfiction, and some of the children’s independent reading involves nonfiction texts, you will want to read aloud nonfiction texts that allow you to show children how nonfiction readers talk and think about (and between) texts.

Whatever skill you aim to teach, it’s essential that you read in ways that not only demonstrate skills, but that above all bring the story to life. Read with expression, fluency, intonation, and good pacing so that children feel like they are a part of the story, and understand that this is what good reading sounds and feels like.

Supporting Children’s Vocabulary

Teachers are wise to recognize that we need to model not only a love of books and of writing, but also a fascination with words themselves. If you wear your love of language on your sleeve, exuding interest in words and taking great pleasure in them, this stance will infuse in your children an attentiveness to vocabulary. And moments of the school day and their lives will provide opportunities to expend their knowledge of words.

Research is clear: The single most important thing you can do to enhance your children’s knowledge of words is to lure your children into lots and lots and lots of reading; if children read a diverse range of books they’ll encounter a wider range of words. The vocabulary in historical fiction, science fiction, and fantasy will often be richer than vocabulary in realistic fiction and mysteries.

You’ll want to teach children that when they come to unfamiliar words in a text, it really helps to pronounce the word as best the reader can, trying it out one way and then another to see if any pronunciation sounds familiar. Then ideally, the reader reads on past that word for just a bit before pausing to reread the section, thinking, “What might this word mean?” The good reader substitutes a reasonable synonym—thus, the ominous clouds become the rainy clouds—and reads on. Some teachers tape an index card to each child’s desk and the child collects a few such words throughout

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the day, with page numbers for references. The children and teacher should try and use these same words in conversations with each other and the class.

There will also be times for a teacher to lead the whole class into word inquiries, and that work will certainly involve the class exploring prefixes and suffixes, and using these to alter the meaning of a base word. The key word is *explore*. Word study will be vastly more helpful if it is engaging to youngsters.

Unit 1 –Authoring an Independent Reading Life, and Becoming Lost in Stories

September

Years ago, Peters and Waterman studied successful American companies and wrote a book that became a classic on leadership. In the preface to *In Search of Excellence*, they wrote advice which is as important to teachers as it is to school leaders: “Let us suppose we were asked for one all-purpose bit of advice—one truth that we were able to distill from all the excellent companies research. We might be tempted to say, ‘Figure out your value system. Decide what your company stands for...Clarifying the value system and breathing life into it are the greatest contributions a leader can make.’” Peters and Waterman go on to say, “The real difference between success and failure of an institution can be traced to the question of how well that organization brings out the great energies and talents of its people. What does it do to help people find common cause with each other?”

Rally Your Children Around This Year’s New Goals

You are the leader of your class, and the advice from these gurus pertains to you. Before your year begins, you need to decide how *you* will tap your children’s talents and energies, rallying them to a common cause. Each year, every teacher launches a reading workshop and a writing workshop. You will want *this* year, *this* reading workshop and *this* writing workshop, to be full of new hope and promise. How will you do this?

This will be one of the things you think about across the summer as you plan for the year ahead. For now, we have a proposal we’d like to put forward. In the year ahead, the Project plans to put a new spotlight on each child composing his or her very own independent reading life, a life that is contoured according to that particular reader. We also hope to begin the year with renewed emphasis on children turning around on their own traces to study themselves as readers. If a child lists five beloved books he or she has read (or heard read aloud), then the child can look back on that list and think, “So what does this list of favorite books reveal about me as a reader? What do I feel passionate about as a reader?” If a child reads and collects post-its or jottings in a reader’s notebook, then that child can look back on what he or she has written, thinking, “So what sort of thinking do I tend to do as I read? How am I unique, among all these other readers?” Children are accustomed to doing author studies; we hope that at the start of the year, you might consider asking children to engage in *reader* studies.

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The purpose of this would be to bring out the uniqueness of each reader, with the idea that you will then build upon each reader's strengths, inclinations and passions. If a child tends to do lots of predicting when he or she makes post-its or jots in a reading notebook, perhaps that child wants to do really strong work on predictions. Which are her very best predictions? What makes a great prediction anyway? This particular child could push herself in that sort of thinking about reading, and could eventually become the class expert on this, showing other children why some predictions are more powerful than others. Similarly, the child who loves mysteries can help decide on new mysteries to buy for the class, and can do book-promotion talks about mysteries.

In part, this emphasis on reflecting on one's own skills, strategies and passions and developing one's own individual identity as a reader is meant to muffle the effect of the reading assessment work which puts focus on a child's reading level. But this is also meant to help children develop a sense of personal agency in reading.

It is a small step to go from bringing out individualism within a reading class to helping support an interdependent, interpersonal community in which children with particular knowledge and skills teach others. The teacher's role, then, can partly become developing local experts, but it soon also includes orchestrating classroom life so those local experts' talents become distributed. "Let's all see if we can study what Brian does when he predicts, and see if we can learn from what he does."

If you decide to emphasize the fact that each of us is unique as a reader, and to stress the importance of looking back on what we do and think when we read so that we come to understand ourselves, you may want to bring out reading tools which accompany this emphasis. The most obvious would be a reading portfolio—a place where readers' *stuff* accumulates. In this portfolio, readers would certainly keep their logs—their records of titles, levels, pages, minutes. You'd also want to keep occasional stop-and-jots in this portfolio. For example, at the start of a string of minilessons on determining importance, you might want to ask readers to stop-and-jot at three intervals during the read aloud, recording what they regard as especially important. And that day, you may ask each child to collect three "determining importance" post-its. You would definitely want to collect the work each child did that day (with the child's name on the work) and to sort it out. Who is particularly strong at this—and what do those children do, exactly? Who seems to struggle with this—and what do those children tend to do when asked to determine importance? You'll no doubt want children to look between their work and the work of their classmates, asking similar questions. Perhaps you'll want to repeat the read aloud, asking children to try again to determine what's important, but this time doing so a stop-and-jot under the influence of their comparative study. In any case, this sort of work needs to accumulate in a child's reading portfolio and to be juxtaposed by similar work done several weeks later.

As you lead children to talk about their reading histories and hopes, you will have lots of occasions to talk up goals you know will be important in the year ahead. Perhaps

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the children will sketch a picture of one time or one book which really mattered to them, and then you will ask them to write or talk about this: “What was it about that one reading time that made reading work for you?” and “How can we be sure that reading is just as magical in the year ahead?” You’ll want to channel these discussions so that you end up highlighting whatever it is you plan to emphasize during this first month of your year.

For example, if you plan to emphasize that readers lose themselves in books, you can set up this work by asking children to talk about times when they’ve read ravenously, or about characters who’d become so real they felt like friends. During the first few days of September, rally the class around the goals you plan to adopt for the next few months.

The Logistics of the Workshop: Establishing Routines and Expectations

Reading is a skill that requires practice. Just as a child learns to swim by swimming, and to play the piano by playing the piano, children need to read in order to get better as readers. In every classroom, teachers will probably want to spend a bit of time at the start of the year stressing the importance of stamina, and encouraging students to read for longer stretches of time, both in school and at home. Just as runners have goals to reach, readers also have goals. Students may learn that when they begin to lose stamina in their books, they can reread or rest their eyes for a moment before continuing. Readers can take brief breaks and then continue reading. They can set goals for themselves, as runners do. If students worked last year to develop stamina, you may make student testimonials central to your teaching; you may stress not only stamina, but also finding stolen moments throughout the day, and carrying books with you always so as to steel those moments.

On the first few days of school, you will want to establish routines and expectations. You’ll want to remind (or teach) children to gather quickly and efficiently for whole-class instruction, teaching this bit of management in a way that upholds the joy of reading. “We won’t want to waste one precious moment of reading time, so this year, let’s get really good at gathering efficiently for the minilesson.” Similarly, if you want to emphasize the importance of children listening (and not constantly interrupting) during the minilesson, you could say, “This year, I want to be sure you have lots and lots of time to read the incredible books we have in this room, so let’s try to keep our minilessons efficient. How about if you save your questions ‘till the minilesson is over?”

This is a good time, too, for you to consider whether your minilessons are usurping too much of children’s reading time. In general, most teachers use the strategy of demonstration and more specifically, of thinking aloud, in reading minilessons. If you do this, try to make the reading and thinking feel like reading, which usually means holding the book in your lap, reading aloud from the book not from the overhead projector. Certainly you will want your thinking-aloud to be very brief—three sentences?—and you’ll probably want to do no more than two demonstrations in any one minilesson. Avoid rambling; if you see children start to tune out, take this as a

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cue! After watching you twice, children get the idea of what you are trying to show them, and they'll want a chance to try whatever you have demonstrated.

You will also want to clarify the tools that you hope children bring each day to the meeting area. These tools will probably include the books children are reading, post-its and/or a reading notebook (this may be the final section of your children's writers' notebooks) and a pencil or pen. You may be working with a touchstone text and want children to bring copies of it to the minilessons each day.

Teach children to expect that although the minilesson will be an occasion for them to learn a new reading skill or strategy, during any one day's reading time, they will hopefully draw on *all* the skills and strategies they have been taught up to and including that day.

Clarify also that each day, readers will be doing some on-the-run writing, either on post-its, charts, or in a reading notebook. This writing will then be brought to the partner conversations. This writing work (brief though it must be) and the partner conversations (which will again be brief) are absolutely essential elements of a reading workshop. You can and will want to establish long-term partners as soon as you have matched readers to books, ideally by the end of day one in the reading workshop! Usually classrooms do not have enough duplicate books for partners to read in sync all the time; but even a little of this is tremendously helpful. If partners can't read the same books, they can, and should, *swap* books. These structures need to be in place by the end of the first week. You definitely don't have time to institute these structures gradually! It is often helpful for children to sit beside their partners during the reading workshop so the transition from reading to talking doesn't usurp valuable reading time (although sometimes this leads children to talk/read/talk/read throughout the reading workshop, which is not what you have in mind).

Partners can support each other in a variety of ways. During reading, they can use post-its to mark confusing words and work together to word-solve. They can use post-its to mark places where they have strong reactions to the text, then talk about what happened in that section and why they reacted so strongly. Partners can listen to each other retell, asking questions to clarify and dig deeper into the story. You might want to teach your students the kinds of questions that could help them do this work. For example, it's helpful to ask questions about the main characters: "What is Mr. Putter like?" It's helpful to ask questions about the reasons why events happened: "Why did he agree to keep the dog?" It's helpful to ask questions that encourage prediction: "What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?" These kinds of questions encourage a reader to not only explain what's happening in the story, but also to think more deeply about *why* those events are happening. In addition, these questions are ones children need to ask themselves as they read.

Your ELLs who need support should probably spend fifteen minutes reading in their native language (if they can do so) before reading easier books in English. If you have matched-language partners for your ELLs in early stages of language

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acquisition, put one of these children in a triad comprised of two native speakers. The ELL child will profit from strong English language models.

Establish routines right from the start. The rhythm of reading, jotting a bit, then talking need not wait past day two. On day two, children will gather for the minilessons, then disperse to read, post-it, and to eventually talk off their post-its with another person. But reading won't amount to much until children are choosing just-right books. Unless children are reading books they can read with 95% accuracy, fluency and strong comprehension, it is superfluous to worry about minilessons that teach strategies for identifying with characters or developing theories!

As mentioned earlier, ideally you will place children at the levels at which they were reading at the end of the previous year, and bypass the phase in which children read from shared bins at the center of a table. If none of your children have yet been assessed and matched to books, and if you do not have records from the previous year to draw upon, you may need to put a bin of random, easy, high interest books at the center of each table. You can move among children, assessing them as they read.

Once you've determined books that are just-right for a particular reader, give that child a personal bin or baggie in which he or she can keep a few just-right books. It helps to get the child started enjoying these books if you rave about a few you believe will be perfect for that child.

The books a child keeps in his or her bin will all be equivalent in level, save for two instances. First, an English language learner who is literate in his or her first language will read difficult books in the native language, and easier books in English. Second, when a child is transitioning to a new book level, that child's book-bin will contain books at both the comfort level, and the new instructional level. Ideally, the latter will be books the teacher has introduced to the child; this works especially well if these are two or three books in a series, and the teacher introduces, and even reads aloud a bit, from the first of those books. This is an important time to be sure that the child's partner (if he or she is also moving up a level) is reading the same slightly more challenging book, so the two partners can support each other.

You will also want to teach children procedures for keeping track of the volume of reading they do. Earlier we described the cumulative reading log, which we believe is absolutely essential. You will need to make sure these logs become integral to the reading workshop. Every day during reading time, each child needs to get his or her log out along with his book. Many September conferences will reference these logs. You might say, "I notice you've been reading faster. Has it been hard to hold on to the story as you read faster?" If a child's pace has slowed, you might ask, "What's slowing you down? I notice you read less today. What got in the way?" The log will also influence your observations. If you see from a glance at a child's log that the child is making slow progress through book, observe the child as she reads silently, checking if there are any noticeable reading behaviors that might be slowing the child down. Does the child move her lips while reading, move her head from side to side,

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point at words as she reads, use a bookmark to hold her place as she reads, or read aloud to herself? If the child does any of these things, you will want to intervene.

It's helpful to know how many pages a child can actually get through in half an hour of reading time. If, for example, we know that a child can read 20 pages of a 120-page *Amber Brown* book in half an hour of reading time, then we'd expect that child to read that much at home each night. At this rate, the child should finish this book after three days and nights of reading. If our knowledge of the expected reading rate of a child who is reading this level of text suggests that this child is reading too slowly, we'd want to egg her on, setting goals for reading faster and working with her to make those goals into realities.

There are few things that matter more in teaching reading than that children progress through books. To encourage slow readers, a teacher might walk around at the beginning of the reading workshop, putting down starting page numbers, then walk back around in the middle of the workshop and jot down how many pages children have read, leaning in and encouraging students to push themselves by saying something like, "Push your eyes across the page faster," or "I love the way you read seven pages. See if you can read eight more."

Usually teachers design systems for a take-home reading. If nothing else, each child has a take-home book baggie. The important thing is that the child needs to read the *same* book in home and at school, carrying the book between places. Often teachers suggest that in a partnership discussion, children give themselves assignments in school, "Let's read to page 75."

Essential Reading Skills: Reading with Stamina and Engagement, Decoding, Monitoring for Sense, Envisionment, Determining Importance, Synthesis, and Prediction

The sub-title above suggests that this one unit teaches the whole shebang, and that's pretty much the truth. Readers need to draw on everything they know and can do in order to read with engagement. Then, as the year progresses, there can be an instructional spotlight on one skill or another. But at the start of the year, we need to be sure that readers are engaged in all the most essential reading skills. You will probably find that our students need to build a relationship to reading, to experience the essence of reading fiction. This means they need to envision enough to make movies in their minds as they read, to predict and empathize, sitting on the edge of their seats as they anticipate the story, as they hold tight to the importance of story-line, determining importance and synthesizing as they go.

Meanwhile, these students will also need to read with accuracy, using decoding and other skills to word-solve and to monitor for comprehension, so when the meaning of a text breaks down, they say, "Huh?" and engage in problem-solving strategies to regain a hold on the text—or to locate a more appropriate text.

These are tall orders—especially considering that we are just getting to know the children! The important thing is that teachers can use reading aloud, book talks,

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partnerships, writing about reading, independent reading, conferring and small groups to support these larger agendas.

The first step toward helping students build their relationship to reading is to make sure that every child is reading with engagement. It is invaluable to steer children towards high-interest books and to talk up those books. When books are exciting, kids pick them up, start reading, and stay with them. Of course, part of this task also includes teaching kids when to put books down. If a child finds that reading a particular book feels like a chore, then he needs to recognize that something is wrong.

Engagement needs to translate into identifiable reading skills. No reader can read imaginative fiction with engagement without envisioning the drama and without predicting what will happen next. It is essential in reading imaginative literature, as fiction is called, that the story ignite a vital sort of imagination, one which allows readers to piece together and live inside the world of the story.

The easiest way to guide children into this “lost in a book” feeling of being caught up in the story is to read aloud an absorbing chapter book, helping children imagine the world of the story and identify with the main character. (This “lost in the story” sense can then be transferred to independent reading.) It is crucial to demonstrate and support lost-in-the-book work at the start of the year. In order to encourage empathy with characters, look up from the read-aloud and say things like, “She must be so sad,” or “I was thinking about her all night...I’m so worried about her.” You can help children care about characters by modeling how to talk and think about the characters as if they are real people. Encourage children to turn-and-talk in ways that promote identification with the character. For example, you might say, “How do you think he’s feeling right now? Turn and talk.” Or, “I’m worried about her. Aren’t you? Turn and tell your partner about your worries.”

Teach children that readers fill in the gaps in a story by drawing on all they see in the text and all they’ve experienced in their lives. If you decide to angle your read-aloud work so as to encourage readers to put themselves in characters’ shoes, and you may decide to suggest kids speak in the voices of characters. “Partner A, pretend you are Opal. Tell your father why you need this dog. Talk to Partner B as if that’s your dad.” Then, after a few minutes, you could say, “Partner B, you are the dad. You are looking at that stray dog. What are you thinking? Say your thoughts aloud....”

You could also have partners predict together what may happen next, based on what they know about their characters so far. Of course, this needn’t involve one partner being one character and one the other. You might say, “Your right finger puppet is Opal. Opal, tell your father (he’s your left finger-puppet) why you need to adopt this dog! And fathers (you could hold up your left hand to indicate that finger-puppet), get ready to talk back to your daughter.”

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This work could lead to little bits of fast-writing: “Pretend you are Opal. You are standing outside that trailer, getting ready to talk to your father. Winn Dixie is right beside you. What are you thinking right now? Stop and jot.”

Another way for partners to role-play is to say the unsaid things they infer a character is probably thinking. If you are reading a part of a book where there is no dialogue, you can help children to imagine the talk that was probably going on. For example, if students are reading the passage in *Number the Stars* (by Lois Lowry) in which Annemarie’s family, who is hiding Ellen from the Nazis in their apartment, is awakened by a pounding on the door in the middle of the night, students could pretend to be Annemarie and Ellen and add dialogue to the scene. Pause after you read this:

It was hours later, but still dark, when she was awakened abruptly by the pounding on the apartment door.

Ask partners to tell each other the missing dialogue, so that, for example, one might pretend to be Ellen and say, “Annemarie, did you hear that noise? Do you think the soldiers are coming for me?” The other, pretending to be Annemarie, might respond, “Wait a minute. Let me go see.” You could then read the next couple lines of text.

Of course, the next step would be to urge each child to listen as if he or she were one of the characters. “Show me on your faces what Annemarie is feeling *now*,” you might say. Or, a bit later, “Use your body to show me what’s happening to Annemarie now.”

Envisioning is a big part of reading with engagement. The act of making mental pictures is strongly linked to comprehension. In order to envision, readers need to read closely enough to draw on textual clues that inform meaning, and they need to draw on all they’ve experienced themselves in order to add more to the text than what’s explicitly detailed. As you read aloud, pause to look up from the text and say, “I’m trying to imagine in my mind what this looks like. I’ve never been to this school but I’m kind of picturing it is like our school—red brick, three stories tall—I’ll read on and see....” (If you have ELLs in your class, as you envision aloud you might quickly sketch what you imagine on a white board.) As you read on in the story about the school, it’s likely that new information in the text will lead you to revise your initial mental pictures. “Oh, now I realize it’s a *white clapboard* schoolhouse! And I’m getting the idea it’s much smaller than our school, because....” Be sure to point out explicitly the ways in which close reading informs your mental pictures, helping you continually revise those pictures in light of new information.

Of course, the goal is not only for children to envision and lose themselves in the books that *you* read aloud. The goal is also for children to do this *for themselves* when they read. You’ll want to teach children to envision through every means possible. During independent reading and the follow-up partnership times, encourage children to talk about their mental pictures. What do the places in the book look like? What

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would a video of this book look like? What has the reader seen before that can help him or her picture the character, the character's home, the locale in which the book is situated? You might encourage a reader to quickly sketch a character or a setting as he or she reads, and then in his or her partnership conversation, to talk through the reasons for this particular image.

During independent reading, you'll also want to help children identify with the characters in their books. You may want to show children that if readers pay attention to how a character acts, to punctuation, to dialogue tags, they can ascertain the character's emotions. They can also feel those same emotions, and trace the evolution of them. For example, you might ask children to post-it a character's feelings, and then to try to read on, carrying the character's feelings so they feel what the character is feeling alongside the character. Teach children that readers care enough about the characters in a book to be angered by what a character has or hasn't done. With prompts like "I can't believe....," "I wish she'd....," or "I'm angry that....," children can talk-back to what characters do.

As students do the beginning work of making connections with their texts, you'll want to push them beyond literal responses like, "I'm a girl and the character is a girl." You may teach students to connect to a character by thinking about a time when they acted or felt similar in a similar situation. Teach children that they can pause in the midst of reading to recall, and perhaps tell their own parallel, small-moment story. Children should think and talk about what this story makes them realize, and what it teaches them about the kinds of people they are. Eventually, they can return to the character(s) and see if the same or similar conclusions can be drawn about them.

By Teaching Readers to Retell and Summarize, We Can Support Word-Solving Monitoring for Sense and Synthesis

Of course, children cannot be lost in a story if they are not reading with accuracy, monitoring for comprehension, and constructing a coherent understanding as they read. We hope that in the year ahead teachers will place more emphasis on teaching readers to self-monitor, because it is only by doing this that children will notice when they are suddenly just reading the words and not creating meaning. These children then need to access correcting strategies. You will want to teach them to say, "Wait a minute. This isn't right," when the text is confusing. Teach them to pay attention to when their understanding falters, recognizing that they need to reread, to adjust their reading rate, and to work extra hard to maintain focus on the text.

If texts are not making sense, and part of this is because kids are having trouble decoding, remember that the child who struggles with "hard words" tends to be one who relies only on phonics to help with those difficult words. This reader desperately needs you to help him or her to read for meaning and to read, thinking about the content of the story. Teach students to anticipate what the word probably says, and to check their guess against what they see. Be sure children understand how to orchestrate the sources of information, so they check to make sure their word work

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during reading looks right (relies on graphophonic clues), sounds right (relies on syntax), and makes sense (relies on semantics).

At the most minimal level, this means that after a child reads a paragraph or a page, the child should be able to retell what just happened, showing how this new development fits with the unfolding story. The child should be aware of times when the story jumps to a new scene, and should be able to synthesize new developments into his or her ever-expanding sense of the story as a whole.

If children are struggling with even this fairly basic comprehension work, then encourage them to do even more basic retelling, and bit by bit move them along a gradient of retelling work. The simplest retelling work a child can do is to pause after reading each chapter or subsection, turn back to the start, skim, and retell what happened in a page-by-page progression. This will be easy for most children and will clarify the idea that retellings are chronologically structured. In the early stages of language acquisition, if you want to help ELLs re-tell, you may suggest children sketch the sequence of events that occurred in the text on paper divided into a sequence of squares. Because children have been in reading workshops for years now, they should all be able to do this very basic level of retelling.

A big word of caution about emphasizing retelling: This very low level of comprehension is *necessary* but absolutely *not sufficient* for success in reading. In New York City, most of the readers who struggle terribly on state tests are ones who read too slowly, and who keep their noses so close to the ground that they can only retell in a very literal, bit by bit fashion (often without even grasping the sequence of a storyline.) It will be important, then, that instead of doing this very literal level of retelling, you teach children to read and synthesize the story into a summary that contains the important elements of a story: the characters' traits and motivations, the main events of the plot told in sequence, the big problem and how that problem is eventually resolved (or how the character changes or the lessons the character learns) and so forth.

For a few days, when you are supporting early level comprehension and retelling work, you may expect your readers to post-it whenever they learn something about the main character's traits, or when a new event happens in the story. If a child struggles with comprehension, the child is apt to experience the story as a chain of events, but not to see that in fact the events are linked together causally. Major events don't come out of nowhere! The important point will be that when a new event happens in the story, the child reflects, "How does this new event fit with what has gone before in the story?" Another powerful way to address this is for the child to notice what the main character does, and then to talk with a partner or jot (with just the quickest of sentences) *why* the character does what he or she does. That is, children need to realize that as they read, the sections of a story should go together, with later sections explained by, and set up by, the ones that come before. Readers understand what they read by synthesizing.

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Third Grade-Decoding Work (and For Fourth and Fifth Graders Who Need This Work)

Based on your assessments, it's important to teach word attack skills explicitly so that readers have a host of strategies to help them through difficulty, including using known words and parts of words to help tackle challenging words. If you notice that your third graders are having trouble decoding, it may be helpful to plan a sequence of instruction. You might focus your teaching around all or some of these four broad topics:

- Strategies for decoding tricky words, often polysyllabic ones
- Strategies for figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words and phrases
- Strategies for monitoring for meaning and for thinking while reading
- Ways to read and talk about books with partners

If your students are having trouble with decoding words, you'll want to make sure your readers are using all sources of information to figure out tricky words (meaning, structure, and visual information) to problem-solve. While looking at the word, students should be asking themselves what makes sense in the story, what sounds right in the sentence, and what looks right for the sounds they are making, and sounds right grammatically.

- Read the first part of the word and think of what would make sense.
- Look for parts you know (educate/uneducated/education). During word study you will want to support children by studying prefixes and suffixes, and showing them patterns in words so that when they see e + r in the word "master," they think of it as a part.
- Move your eyes across the word part by part (syllabication of a word). Depending on your students' needs as readers, you might teach them how to read through a word part-by-part, from left to right—so when they try to figure out a word like "illustration," they move across the word reading "ill-us-tra-tion," rather than looking for familiar words within the word. When they are told to "look for little words inside the big word," they might end up reading a big word such as illustration like this: "I'll-us-tr-at-I-on." This distorts the word in such a way that it may be undecipherable.
- Children who can take a word apart also need to learn how to pull a word together. Some people refer to this as "crashing the word." Once the child figures out the beginning of the word, he or she needs to return to this and now reach for the next chunk. For example, when reading the word "intonation," the child would say, "in- inton- intona- intonation."
- Use words you know to help you figure out a tricky word. It is helpful, for example, if a child who encounters a word such as "education" realizes that the beginning is like the "ed" in "bed," and the ending is like the "cation" in vacation.
- Read to see if a word makes sense if the vowels make one sound, and then the experiment with the vowels making another sound.

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- It's important to note that regardless of the print strategy, it's critical to teach students to ask themselves, "What would make sense here?" You'll want to teach this as a companion to any strategy they use to figure out hard words.

Most importantly, we need to teach our students to be flexible word solvers, using more than one strategy, and more than one time. Children who struggle with decoding benefit from rereading; you might have children keep a book in their baggie which has passages or chapters they read often, practicing reading with automaticity and fluency.

Another word-solving issue many children face is what to do when they encounter words and phrases that they can decode but do not understand. As they progress along a gradient of difficulty, their books will include a wider range of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, some of which may be unfamiliar or confusing.

While you are assessing readers, you will no doubt see that some of your children are skipping over (or mumbling through) words that cause them difficulty. You'll want to teach your students that strong readers are curious about words, and that we try our best to understand what words and phrases mean as we read. It's fine for a child to read past a challenging word in order to establish the context in which the word belongs, but once the child has gleaned the word's meaning from context, he or she needs to reread the sentence, inserting a synonym for the unknown word.

You may need to teach children how to ascertain a general feeling for a word's meaning from the context. For example, if a student gets stuck on the word "prized" in an excerpt that reads something like, "Lily finally admitted to her mother that she was playing catch with the neighbor's dog when he ran through and ruined her prized rose bush," teach the child to think about what would make sense, and substitute a word. The child might say, "Hmm, it sounds like it must have been a special rose bush, so maybe it means something like special." Teach them also that they can build up their speaking and writing vocabulary through reading, and that one of the fun jobs for readers is to collect and remember words and their definitions.

As always, we want to remind our students that as they read, they need to attend not only to print, but to reading with their minds on fire at the same time. It is not okay if whole passages of texts are decoded but not comprehended. When we ask students to be involved in informal partner conversations about the various texts they read, the knowledge that they will share their thoughts with another reader tends to drive their reading forward. They read with alertness, knowing they can quickly jot down ideas to share on a post-it, and expect their partner to do the same. So even if a child struggles with word attack, be sure the child has a partner with whom to talk.

Partners can support decoding work by putting post-its onto sections of the text in places where they tried to figure out words, then meeting to show off their problem-solving work. The more children see, hear and say words that cause them difficulty, the more apt they'll be to remember these words.

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Depending on what your assessments reveal, you'll decide how much of your decoding work will be focused around whole-class, small group or individual needs. Keep in mind that small-print work should show up in all units throughout the year.

Implications for ELA test preparation:

Reading tests reveal whether children *can read*, and nothing could be more important for that goal than this unit's focus on rallying children to read a lot of just-right books with fluency and comprehension. On the test, children need to read at a good speed, and to sustain long stretches of reading. The number one obstacle to high performance on the ELA is below grade level reading, which influences their vocabulary, stamina and pace. High volumes of reading will move children up so they are successfully reading at levels which are close to the test level. This is crucial.

Students must be able to answer questions on the ELA pertaining to characters. When they can envision characters well, they can identify their traits. In addition, if students are able to determine the main events in a story they will be able to pay closer attention to the parts of the text that connect to the questions. When students are lost in the world of their stories, this means they habitually synthesize and predict, and this will enable them to answer many of the inference and prediction questions on the ELA.

When students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they are able to set goals for themselves as readers both in terms of levels and habits. Decoding will help students navigate and be able to navigate through difficult vocabulary.

In addition, this unit teaches children to listen and follow directions. By establishing an effective read aloud, children begin to develop the listening comprehension necessary for the test.

Unit 2 –Reading With Your Mind On Fire: Readers Infer and Grow Ideas About Characters

October

It is impossible to read a novel well and not think about the characters' traits, motivations, struggles and lessons. This means that a unit of study on character feels somewhat inevitable, and also that you can teach a unit on characters without needing a specialized library. Children can grow ideas about characters when they are reading any fiction book at all! Furthermore, by teaching readers to think about characters, you can support inferential, constructive reading. So when the year is still young, you will probably want to put a spotlight on characters.

There are a couple of major challenges in this unit. First, children will have "studied" characters last year and the year before. So your unit especially needs to be assessment-based. What is the thinking work that your children already do as they

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read? What don't they do yet? Then, too, there is the challenge of rallying children's enthusiasm for this unit. How will you differentiate this year's work from the work they have done in previous years so that they believe this is new work (even when actually, readers need to get better at the same set of skills year after year.) Will you tell children that last year they studied characters, and this year you hope they study relationships? Friendships? The journeys that characters experience, both externally and internally, in a book? Will you suggest that last year they studied characters and this year they will learn to walk in characters' shoes? That last year they focused on the main character and this year they will think especially about secondary characters and their relationships to the main character?

The deeper challenge is this. You need to decide not only how you will sell this unit to your children, but also how you will define it for yourself. "Characters" are crucial in any story, but there is no reading skills called "characters." So you need to approach this unit recognizing that although children will think this is a unit on characters (or relationships or friendships etc.), you, meanwhile, will know this is a unit on whatever skills you decide to highlight.

The unit will be different if you decide to highlight personal response and envisionment, or if you decide to highlight monitoring for sense and prediction. The Project will soon post a variety of teaching plans for this unit on our web site. Each plan will include teaching points for the month and at least half a dozen suggested minilessons, all of which will have been written by Teachers College graduate students. None of these posted units of study will be perfect, but we hope that they invite you to imagine your own trajectory through this very rich terrain.

Remember that your teaching must be cumulative. On day two or three of this new unit, be sure to put a spotlight on whatever you especially emphasized during last month's unit, and act absolutely baffled if any child in the room is not carrying all that you taught last month with him, with her, throughout this new unit. If you emphasized keeping daily logs, it is crucial that YOU don't forget those logs now! If you emphasized that each child in the class is unique as a reader, and that it is important to learn from each others' ways with texts, you will want to continue to thread that emphasis throughout this upcoming unit. The other important word of caution is this: No matter what, you will want to make sure that the unit does not overwhelm children's reading. Make sure that your children continue to actually read, eyes on print, for 40 minutes each day in school and for close to that same amount of time at home.

As in the first unit, one essential commitment we'll make in our classrooms is to have our students working in partnerships everyday. Depending on the availability of books in your classroom library, partners can be reading the same books, or different books from the same series, or just different books they swap. If partners have a character in common, the conversation can focus on the shared characters. If you don't have enough series books in your classroom for partners to read within the same series, you'll need to do more work teaching each partner to listen carefully in order

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to follow the development of characters across their partners' texts. You'll want to coach partners to talk across different books, noticing what's similar and different in the characters.

To help sustain partner talk, ask students to prepare for conversations with partners by rereading whatever jotting they have done, whether that jotting is in a reader's notebook or on post-its and theory charts. Once children are talking with a partner, remind them to use conversational prompts such as:

- "What in the text makes you say that?"
- "I thought that too, here's why..."
- "Another example of that is..."
- "I thought something different..."
- "I agree because..."
- "Wait. I'm confused. Are you saying..."
- "Have you found the same thing with the character in your story?"

Whole-class conversations are a wonderful way to support children's partner conversations. With high amounts of scaffolding, students are able to grow a conversation together by sticking to an idea (or two ideas). Finish reading aloud a chapter and ask, "Can someone get us started in a conversation about this chapter?" Teach readers that great book talks begin with ideas which are central to the text and provocative enough to merit conversation. Once a child makes a comment, give everyone time to mull it over for a moment, and even to look at the text or jot notes or talk with a partner so as to consider way to talk back to that idea. Then you might ask, "Who can talk back to this idea?" Students can then try sticking to that idea, using evidence from the text to support their thinking. Coach them to listen and then talk back to each other, by saying things like, "So Nieyajaha just said x; let's all stop and think about that. Does anyone think that fits with what you were saying in your T & T conversation?" or "Oh, interesting! Kozmo thinks that Sassy shouldn't have reacted that way. Think and then talk with your partner about where you stand on that. Let's add on."

Below is one possible trajectory for this unit. Afterwards, I'll share a second, less detailed plan for this unit.

One Possible Emphasis: Teach Children to Follow Characters Through a Text, Noticing Their Changes and Lessons

In order to read fiction with engagement—and to do well on standardized tests—children need to attend to the protagonist's traits, motivations, problems, changes and lessons. It is easy to list those items, but helping children to actually do the thinking work involved is not easy. From the start, you'll want to teach children that good readers read with attentiveness, alert to detail. Readers especially pay attention to details about characters, notice how characters talk, what they do and do not do, how they treat each other, and notice the choices a character does and does not make. By attending to details about character, readers learn to consider the implications of details, looking for patterns that tell what kind of person a character is.

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The work you will be doing with character this month needs to build on and vitalize the work you did in September around envisionment and empathy. This month, you may want to show children that writing can be a tool to help us experience a story deeply. By all means start by using the read-aloud to help children experience the power of writing as a way to walk in the shoes of a character, to experience the world of a story. Read aloud, then say something like, “I can just see him (referring to the protagonist). Can’t you? Pretend you are him, right now. Look around. What do you see? What do you notice? Look more closely. Exactly what do you see? Make it up out of everything you know and everything you can guess. Right now, jot what you see. Start, “I see....” After children jot for a bit, you may intervene and say, “What is your character thinking as he sees this? Start by writing, “The thought this gives me is....” After children jot for a few minutes, continue to read; after five more minutes of reading, set them up for a similar “stop and jot.” This writing will spark grand conversations after you finish the reading, so you’ll want to give children a chance to share their writing at that point.

Once children have read a few chapters, you can teach them to look back to an important event, seeing this as a window to the character. What does the character’s response to this event say about the character? “When a character does one thing (and not another), what might this suggest about that character as a person?” You’ll need to teach your students that they can construct ideas not explicitly stated in the text—to infer by saying, “It says...this makes me think or know...”

Be sure that your class doesn’t get into the habit of expecting you to dole out the day’s work in the day’s minilessons. That is, if on Monday you teach children that they can think about the decisions a character makes and infer what this reveals about the character, and on Tuesday you teach that they can pay attention to character’s relationships, it is absolutely crucial that when you confer with readers on Tuesday, you remind them to draw on Monday as well as Tuesday’s minilessons (and on the previous weeks!) If every child in the class is engaged in the same work with texts, this is a sure sign that the teacher is not helping kids develop a repertoire of skills and strategies to draw upon as needed when reading! We cannot stress enough the importance of children developing a cumulative repertoire of response possibilities, and learning that the text will guide us to draw on one or another source of information at any given time.

The work with character, including the work of coming to know and understand the protagonist, can gain depth if you use experiences within your classrooms to teach children to observe astutely, and to make and revise theories about characters. For example, you might point out in one day’s minilessons that in life as well as in books, we watch how people act, noticing especially how they respond to events; from this we formulate tentative theories about them. You might say something like, “I noticed the way you all pulled together the other day when Jeremy was hurt. I saw Randalio making a band-aid out of a paper towel, and from his actions I got the idea that he is quick-thinking and resourceful. And I watched the way Leo kept out of everyone’s way and then found quiet ways to help, and I thought, ‘That’s just the way Leo acts

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during morning jobs, too.’ I saw a pattern! So I thought, ‘This gives me the idea that Leo is observant, and that his quietness helps him be especially thoughtful.’” Then debrief by saying something like, “Do you see how I made theories about Leo and Randalio based on their actions? Readers do that too.” You can tell children that just as we grow theories about people around us, we can also grow theories about characters in books.

You will want to notice the struggles your children encounter trying to do this work, and then to invent teaching in response to what they show you. For example, many children need to be taught that readers glean information about a character not only from passages pertaining directly to that character but also from many other passages—those telling about the character’s home, for example, or the character’s family. “Let’s read this story together and think, ‘Which part tells me something about Robert,’” the teacher might say, and then proceed to show that passages describing Robert’s home provide windows onto his character.

Improvitational drama can be another support for our students’ work with character in both Read Aloud and partner work. For example, you might pause in your reading to say something like, “It says that Opal walked into the trailer to talk to her dad. How does she walk in? Pretend you’re Opal, how would you open the door? What would you be doing? Thinking?” Children will, of course, point out that the text does not *say* how Opal got from the doorway to her father’s side, so you’ll want to help them understand that readers are always filling in the gaps of a text as we read, by drawing on all we learn from this book, from other books, and from our lives.

You may want to emphasize that readers pay attention not only to what a character does but also to *how* the character does these things. Does the text give any clues about the character’s gestures? About the way a character walks or sits or closes the door? If the text says that a character slumps in the chair, then the reader needs to ask, “Why does she sit like that? Is she tired? Bored? What’s going on?” Readers also pay attention to the way characters talk: the words they choose, their tone of voice, the emotional cues the author adds with dialogue. All of these give hints about what kind of people live in the world of a story. Sometimes the author offers windows into a character’s mind: passages of thinking, or an explanation of a character’s motives.

Children also need to be taught that the story will tell specifics—Robert started his essay five times, each time crumpling his discarded lead into a wad. The reader’s job, then, is to supply generalizations—words that name the sort of person this character seems to be. The reader won’t find those words in the text but must instead bring those words to the text. Many children will reach first for generic terms: a character is nice, mean, or good. You may want to create a literary word-chart to help children realize that a “nice” character might be “generous” or “encouraging” or “loyal” or “patient.” A mean character might be “intolerant” or “snide” or “jealous” or “malicious,” even. Some teachers suggest kids rate the synonyms for “nice” along a gradient of niceness in order for children to begin to grasp the nuances of each word. A child who has marked passages in a story that reveal the character’s traits can profit

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from being invited to reach for the precisely true word that captures the character's personality.

Of course, once a child has read, attending to specifics in the story, and using those specifics to help spark insights about the character, that child will need to be taught that characters are complicated, they are not just one way. Then too, characters change. Either way, a reader will need to read on in the text, thinking, "Do these new sections of the text confirm or challenge my ideas about the character?" You may want to teach children to think between two or three related sections of a text—say, a passage at the start, one at the middle, and one at the end, in order to talk and think very specifically about a character's evolution across the storyline. Children tend to rely on sweeping generalizations when talking about the ways a character changes or the lessons a character learns, and you will want to teach children to grow grounded, accountable and especially, precise ideas.

Teach readers to use their knowledge of how-stories-tend-to-go to remind them of what's worth noticing in a story and to inform their thinking about character change. In literature, stories are often built around a central structure in which a main character faces challenges, some explicit and some more nebulous. The character draws on what's inside himself or herself to meet these challenges, and often changes in the process, developing new inner resources. Often not only the main character changes in this process, but other characters change as well. This way fluent readers come to realize that events in stories are consequential; the choices made by one character affect others, and single events often have a significant impact on other events.

Ideas become more complex and more specific as one reads on and further develops an initial idea. More complicated ideas are generally conveyed in more words. Teach children to develop their ideas, borrowing on information in later sub-sections of this write-up.

If you decide to teach children to think about the protagonist's traits, motivations, problems (or struggles,) lessons and/or changes, you will probably ask children to keep post-its (and perhaps "theory charts") as they read and to meet for 5 minutes with a partner at the end of every reading workshop in order to share their post-its. Chapters 17 and 18 of *The Art of Teaching Reading* will help you support wise use of those post-its and theory charts.

Whenever you teach kids to use a tool, you will want to revisit their work with that tool. If you decide to emphasize an attentiveness to student work this year, you will no doubt want your children to look back on their own post-its and each others, thinking about them. You can ask children to reread their post-its, noticing that some simply say what is occurring in the text and others say the readers' ideas about what they've read. Ask them to start the post-its that carry ideas, and to use these as Mentor Post-its. Children can furthermore gather in a small group and look across all their post-its, locating one which seems especially thoughtful. They can study that one

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Mentor Post-it and invent ideas about what makes thinking about characters especially rich, then they can try to read that day, doing similarly rich thinking (and jotting.)

Children can also notice that although they are all thinking about characters, they do this differently. Perhaps some raise questions about characters, looking for reasons why characters act as they do. Perhaps others worry about their characters like they'd worry about their friends. Children can categorize the different sorts of thinking they see themselves and small groups of others doing, and then decide to take-on another person's ways of thinking about characters. If you do this work, don't be too intrusive. It should not yield teacher-led, teacher sponsored categories and definitions. The whole point is for children to be invited into an inquiry and for them to develop ideas that inform their work. Let the language in your classroom be their language, and be sure the whole class doesn't come together to create a single set of sanctioned ways to talk and think about characters.

You will remind children to prepare for their partner talks by rereading their post-its and selecting one or several to talk about in some depth. If your children are accustomed to working with "boxes-and-bullets" (see the essays unit), you can help them jot main and support ideas as they prepare for partner conversations. Either way, once they gather with a partner, encourage them to "talk long" about an idea, using conversational prompts such as, "I agree with you..." or "Another example of that is..." Obviously these partner conversations will be richer if both children are reading about the same character.

You'll want to teach children to look over their post-its in order to develop bigger theories about their characters. A child might conclude, "I think he is a good friend"; then you'll teach that child to read on, expecting his theories to become more complex (which generally means longer, with qualifiers added), or to change. It's crucial to teach children to revise their initial ideas in light of new information. A child might start off with a theory that "Gilly is mean" and then learn first to open up that idea, that word by using more specific ways to talk and think. Then the reader can read on, focusing on more parts of the book and thinking about how they fit or don't fit with the theory the child develops. Such a child could end up thinking not, "Gilly is mean" but "Gilly hurts others so they don't get close to her and don't matter to her, and so they, like her mother, don't hurt her."

Another Possible Emphasis: Teach Children to Grow Their Own Ideas: Talking and Writing With Minds on Fire

You may decide to angle this unit so as to especially help readers develop, elaborate upon, test and revise their own wonderful ideas as they read. Too many children's "ideas" when they are reading stories amount to, "He bought bread," or "He is the older brother." If we introduce children to the best of literature and they come away from it thinking only, "He went to the store and bought bread," something is wrong! This trajectory through the character-unit, then, especially focuses on the importance of children developing theories as they read.

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To accomplish your goal, you may decide to emphasize talking and writing in order to grow ideas. Most children are already talking thoughtfully, but it is likely that the children in your classroom have never really experienced the power of writing-as-a-tool-for-thinking. You may decide to help children grow a new relationship with writing about reading.

If you decide to help children develop a new relationship to writing about reading, YOU need to do the same. So first of all, we strongly encourage you and your colleagues to purchase small notebooks for yourselves, to get yourself a wonderful book (it can be children's literature if you like—try *Becoming Naomi Leon* by Pam Munoz Ryan if you aren't sure of a worthwhile book—but better yet, read an adult book such as *The Kite Runner*.) Then read this book while keeping your own reader's response notebook. Your rule of thumb must be this. Writing for real. Write in response to reading often, but don't allow yourself to write in one way or another simply because that is the way you've told kids they were supposed to write. Try to write for real, in ways that mirror your mind work as a reader. But do try to think *as* you write, letting the pen take your mind to places you haven't gone. Write an idea and then stay with it, writing a phrase such as "This is important because..." or "So I am saying..." And then say and think more.

If you enter this unit keeping a reading notebook, trying hard to write about reading with authenticity, and in ways that make your reading smarter, you'll be better able to help children re-create their relationships to reading notebooks. But this will work only if your students understand that reading notebooks aren't for the assignment of the day; they're places in which readers record whatever we truly think during reading. Ideally, the notebooks will capture children's true thoughts—quickly, in fragments—as they read.

If you want to help each child to develop his or her own, new, true relationship with writing about reading, you might also point out that for too long, the writing children have done about reading has always been for someone else. The writing has been like a serf's wages, paid to a noble. It has been part of a system of bondage. If you want to set children free as readers and writers-about-reading, ask them to invent their very own ways to think and write as they read. Tell them that the writing and thinking they do as they read needs to reflect their personalities and their thoughts just as handprints do. Keep clear in your mind that the goal in writing about reading is not little miniature literary essays—the goal, instead, is insightful, deep, probing, thoughtful scraps of language. While in the midst of reading, you certainly do NOT want a child to write with a thesis statement and to provide evidence. That is the sort of writing you may want a child to do at one point or another, but the writing one does in the midst of reading needs to reflect the reader's mind on fire.

By all means, invite children to personalize their reading notebooks. Lots of children in one class used Scholastic book orders and catalogs as sources for little replicas of book jackets, which they then laminated onto their reading notebook cover.

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If you have told children that their reading notebooks will be theirs, you won't want to contradict this with little daily tasks to write in a double entry format, or to write about one thing or another. Be very clear that your minilessons suggest possibilities but that readers have ownership of their own reading notebooks. You can, however, ratchet up the level of their writing, thinking and reading both through class inquiries and through conferences. In class inquiries, invite children to engage in Readers Studies (like Author Studies.) "Let's look back on our entries and think about the kinds of thinking work each of us tends to do as a reader," you might say. "Do you notice that above all, as a reader, you ask questions? Or do you see yourself gathering facts, accumulating information?" Of course, once a child has noticed what he or she tends to do as a reader, you can help particular children take their ways-with-texts farther, becoming particularly adept at that sort of thinking. A reader who responds personally to characters can be encouraged to pursue that sort of work (see the chapter on Personal Response in *The Art of Teaching Reading*) and then this child can mentor others in this sort of thinking. Similarly, children can star sections in their reading notebooks where they thought they were really thinking in deep and insightful ways, and they can try to name what it was they did in those instances that they could try to do in another instance. They can then use their own best work as a mentor, aiming to do more work like that.

Meanwhile in conferences, you can leaf through six or seven pages of a child's reading notebook, saying, "Will you walk me through the journey of thinking you've been on lately?" As the child gives you a guided tour of the thinking he or she has been doing in the midst of reading, focus not on the quality of writing but on the thinking the child is doing. Notice qualities of thinking that apply to many entries and texts. Then say, "What I noticed that you tend to do a lot as a reader is...", and from there, you can help lift the level of the child's work.

Meanwhile, of course, you will want to teach in a way that gives children a repertoire of strategies to draw upon when they think about characters. You probably selected this path—this emphasis on growing big ideas about characters—because children have already learned to read, thinking about character traits. You would probably still want to revisit the work described earlier, this time rallying children to really grow ideas (and not just retell information) about the main character, but if children have been thinking about the main character for years now, you'll want to suggest new lines of thought. Perhaps, for example, you'll stress the importance of thinking about the secondary characters and more importantly, the relationships among characters...or perhaps you'll emphasize that characters go on journeys (both external and internal ones). Readers can read, thinking about those journeys.

Whatever your trajectory, you should probably weave in more attentiveness to secondary characters. A strong reading of a story can never take into account only the protagonist. Perhaps one child in a partnership can pay attention to one secondary character and another child in the partnership to another. You will want them to think especially about the relationships among characters. How is one character's actions making another character feel? Encourage readers to talk about the different motivations that different characters have, and the way those motivations intersect.

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Often the real action—the truly provocative drama—happens in the relationships *between* characters, and especially between the protagonist and the secondary characters. You might suggest children ask, “What relationships are important to the characters in this book?” These may be friendships, parent-child relationships, even oppositional relationships. What do the individuals in these relationships get and need from each other? Are there groups—cliques, gangs, teams—within the book? How do individuals fit in (or not fit in) to these groups?

Students often have struggles coming up with and talking about the character. Students can now create lists of vocabulary that they can use in talking about the vocabulary. These words may come from their talk, what they read, or from your words, helping them to discuss and relate to the character. They could also be encouraged to use these words during partner talk as they discuss character.

It is sometimes helpful for children to realize that just as stories unfold in predictable ways, with a character wanting something and then running into trouble....so, too, there are predictable roles that characters can play in books. In many stories, for example, a character encounters a surprising teacher. Perhaps the teacher is a younger child, or an animal even, or a very old person. In many stories, the main character has a sidekick. These sidekicks can play predictable roles. Many stories contain a villain.

It will be important to remind children that both people and characters are complicated. It’s all too easy to pigeon-hole people in our lives as being one way or another, and it’s easy to pigeon-hole characters as well. But none are all-one-way. We can teach children to live on and read on, giving characters and people the opportunity to become three dimensional, and giving ourselves a chance to develop more complex notions of the people we meet in life and in books.

Implications for ELA test preparations:

This unit will have immediate payoff for your students when answering multiple choice questions. In order to answer these questions, readers need to pay attention to characters’ traits, motivations, and problems, which is the heart of this unit. It is also important that readers glean a sense for how stories “go.” Use the wall chart to help students become accustomed to speaking well about character traits. A character is not just good—she is something more specific: Generous? Resourceful? Sociable? Also, teach children that when they read short stories, there is work one does at the start of the story (looking for character traits and motivation) and at the middle of the story (what is the character struggling with?). This sets them up to know what to do at the beginning, middle and end of any narrative text.

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Unit 3 – Nonfiction Reading and Independence in Reading Fiction

November

Overview

This unit involves three main strands of work: Children will read expository non-fiction texts, they will read narrative nonfiction, and they will keep up independent reading lives as readers of chapter books, including fiction, biographies, or true stories. You'll want children to read, and learn to read, a diverse range of nonfiction texts. Some will be informational texts, organized with headings and sub-headings. Some will be nonfiction narrative. And some of the nonfiction will contain mixed text structures. This unit is laden with important challenges. Above all, your plans need to take into account the resources on which you can and cannot draw, and the reading abilities of your children. Several reading studies have recently reinforced what most teachers already know: If a child is reading M books in fiction, you should expect that child to be reading K books in nonfiction. (However, it is also true that children who are reading nonfiction material of which they have *considerable* prior knowledge can typically read at their fiction reading level.)

Guard against asking children to read nonfiction texts that are too difficult—or else, inevitably, very few children will spend long stretches of time engaged in nonfiction reading. A study known as the “Sawtooth Study” showed that the reading levels of low-income children in a Northeastern district dip down several notches every summer simply because those children are spending two months not reading. We cannot afford to have a similar dip every November due to the fact that children are holding nonfiction books they cannot read with fluency and comprehension. This is especially important since this unit is followed by test prep, when children will again spend time working with challenging texts. It is essential, therefore, that children work with nonfiction texts they can read easily. They also need to continue reading narrative texts (fiction, biographies, true stories, etc.), to keep up their stamina and reading rate. Some children read nonfiction very slowly. In half an hour, they may read an article of only one or two pages. This is not even close to enough reading to sustain their continued growth.

Organizing the Unit: Study Your Library and Devise a Plan

What, then, is recommended? First, it's crucial to reserve time every day (at least fifteen minutes in school and more time at home) for children to continue reading just-right chapter books, using and practicing all the skills you've already taught. Half this unit centers around supporting children's independent reading lives as readers of stories. Be sure children continue to maintain their reading logs. Monitor that they're reading the proper number of chapter books each week; probably anywhere from two to four, in addition to the informational nonfiction texts they will read.

We recommend you set students up to read with a partner across a series of books. You'll need to devote some teaching time each week to support these partnerships (such as using post-its to prepare to talk to a partner, making quick, rigorous reading plans and following them, using a partner to deepen comprehension by comparing retellings, thoughts, questions and interpretations). You'll also want to remind

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children of goals and strategies to draw upon when reading fiction. They can be reminded to pay attention to characters and story structure, for example. You may encourage children to spend some of their independent reading time reading not fiction stories but biographies. If you do this, teach your children that biographies are really stories, and that they should rely upon what they know about stories to read this genre.

Teaching Children to Read Non-Narrative or Expository Nonfiction

Decide on the expository nonfiction reading your children will do by looking, above all, at your texts. If you have access to the appropriately leveled texts to do so, there are lots of advantages to inviting children into a deep study of a whole-class topic. Children learn to be stronger nonfiction readers when they read deeply in one subject area; they begin by reading easier books on a topic and then gradually build expertise that lets them tackle harder texts successfully. If you're teaching children who don't have many opportunities to study social studies and/or science, and especially if those children are English language learners, you might want to merge this unit with your work around a content-area theme. (This could be a high-interest social studies topic, or it could be any subject around which you have lots of books and lots of student interest. For example, you could study endangered animals or immigration.) The advantages to teaching nonfiction reading by involving children in a deep study of a theme are *especially* important in classrooms filled with ELLs and struggling readers who benefit from whole-class support for vocabulary and concepts. But all nonfiction readers tend to read many texts about a topic, and interrelate what they learn with online information, museum visits, travel experiences, conversations, and observations.

If you don't have enough appropriately leveled texts on a single subject, you may have many texts about a few subjects, so individual students can choose to study a subject in which they are interested. You'll find, for example, that some children are fascinated by extreme sports, others by weather disasters, or farm animals.

Finally, if you do not have enough texts on any given subject to allow students to study one topic from a variety of texts, you may organize your nonfiction library, and the unit, by types of texts and levels: There may be level L-M texts that are expository nonfiction in one bin, and level N-O nonfiction texts in another, etc. You may not have enough expository texts at your children's levels for them to be able to keep a few of these books in a personal book baggie; children may need to read the texts and put them back in the bins, looking across texts more for how they're organized than for what they're about.

Launching the Unit

No matter how you decide to organize your nonfiction library—whether within one common subject, a few subjects, or simply as a browsing library of many subjects—begin by allowing children to browse the library, so they can see what interests them and notice the way nonfiction texts are set up to include categories of information and a variety of text features. The first time students encounter these nonfiction texts, they

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often want to look at the pictures and handle the books, taking pleasure in the novelty of these. The first day, you will want to channel this enthusiasm, getting children to notice what parts of nonfiction spark their interest, and how nonfiction books are crafted to entice readers. Teach the difference between recreational nonfiction reading or browsing (reading the way someone might in a grocery checkout line) and reading to learn: Choosing a nonfiction text wisely, committing to it, and reading the whole text.

Once your nonfiction readers select a text, their first task will be to figure out the topic of the expository text. Teach them to look at the title, the cover, the table of contents, and the introduction. Very often a child will say, “This is about elephants.” Reading on, that child will add to and revise this by saying, “This section is about how we should protect elephants.” We need to help children elaborate. For example, even after narrowing the topic this far, the child will ideally read on, asking, “What is the author saying about how we should protect elephants?”

As you teach your children to preview the text and the page that they will read, teach them not only to identify the subject but also to locate clues that will reveal how they can best read the text. If the text has a section heading that is a question, such as, “What was a wagon train?” the reader should know that one way to understand this section is to read looking for an answer. If in a book about penguins the section heading is “Fishing Champions” teach readers to turn the heading into a question and read for the answer, such as, “Why are penguins fishing champions?” If the heading indicates an idea with multiple supports, such as, “Causes of the Conflict” then the reader knows to read searching for cause number 1, 2, 3... If the heading is “Comparing Uniforms” then the reader knows his or her job is to read finding the similarities and differences between Union and Confederate uniforms.

You will want to spend a good amount of time helping children determine the main idea of a passage. There are many questions related to this topic on the 3rd-5th grade ELA. Teachers can count on the fact that children need help doing this work. Teach children to read the first sentence of a paragraph and ask, “What is this saying?” Then they can read on, sentence by sentence, asking, “How does this fit with what’s been said so far?” Children will often notice that three of the four sentences will be about one main thing, and then another sentence—or a whole section—will be tangential. Readers need to expect that nonfiction texts often tuck in bits of “cool” but extraneous and distracting details. To find the main idea readers need to take the sentences they’ve read and say what they learned in one short statement, not a question. Teach students to chunk the text using the subheadings or section headings, and at the end of each chunk to cover the text and say (or write on a post-it) “This part teaches me...” Then: “It teaches me by giving examples or evidence such as...”

We can support our students in determining the main idea by also teaching them to identify the “Who” and the “What” of the paragraph or section. This helps readers identify the subject and the central action as they read. To find the main idea, readers need to figure out the relationship between the “Who” and the “What”. For example,

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“Who” might be gorillas and “What” could be intimidating intruders by beating their chests. The child might say, “The main idea of this paragraph is...when gorillas want to scare off intruders, they beat their chests to make them go away.” As readers progress, they needn’t always stop their reading to think, “What is this part teaching me?” Sometimes it is helpful for them to simply look for the “pop out sentence” as they read, knowing that often one sentence seems to summarize the content of a paragraph or a passage. We teach students that this topic sentence is often the first or last sentence—but not always!

Readers can move from finding the main idea of a section to figuring out the overarching idea of a selection by noticing as they read from one paragraph to another whether the two paragraphs continue to build on one main idea. Does the second paragraph turn a bend, laying out yet another idea? Nonfiction texts can be tricky because section dividers are often invisible; readers need to be vigilant, reading in such a way that they notice when the text has gone through a transition and saying, “Oh, this is about a new sub-topic.” Of course, once readers can ascertain what a chunk as small as a paragraph is mostly about, they’ll benefit from looking back on the whole page or the whole chapter and saying, “*This* is mostly about. . .” At this point you’re essentially asking children to reproduce the same boxes-and-bullets work in reading that they’re doing in writing. To help readers understand how this might look, show them examples of two post-its and ask them to compare them. For example, after reading aloud a section called “American Boy Shot in Anti-British Demonstration” you can put on the overhead these two post-its:

In 1770 a crowd of angry Americans surrounded the house of a man named Ebenezer.

British sent soldiers to scare Americans to follow their laws.
-angry colonists threw rocks
-innocent boy is killed by a loyalist

Students should be able to see that the second post-it contains the overarching idea of the section with two supports, while the first post-it has just a detail.

A word of caution: this instruction is geared toward teaching students to ascertain the main idea, and to marshal some support for their opinion. The emphasis is not on collecting tiny intriguing facts. Too much attention to tiny facts will distract readers, when your real goal is to teach them to read for main ideas. Usually when teachers encourage children to attend to little facts, this is part of a bigger emphasis on note-taking. This unit may not be the best time to stress note-taking; nonfiction reading is slow and hard enough as is. This *is*, however, a good time to ask children to post-it main ideas and talk about them, retell them, as they do when they read fiction. If you decide to encourage your children to note-take, it’s crucial that you don’t ask them to

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record tiny facts; ask them instead to jot ever-so-quick versions of boxes-and-bullets: Main ideas and supporting information. This, too, is a temporary tool. Eventually, children will do this in their minds and won't need to read, stopping and jotting the main idea and supports for every page they encounter. They may choose to do the latter, however, when information is difficult or particularly important.

Essentially you'll be asking children to read in such a way that they can take the sort of notes you might take at a lecture. The notes will look like very rough outlines. You may want to teach children to retell their texts to partners, using these notes in ways that reconstruct the author's main ideas and supporting information.

Readers need to know that as they read, they're sectioning the text into meaning-chunks. They'll profit from consistently pausing at the end of a chunk of text to make sure they understand what the author has said. It's helpful for a reader to paraphrase at the end of a chunk, pausing to name the gist of what she just read, and to do so in ways that build on what she learned from previous sections. The child will want to paraphrase instead of having her own thinking so that, for example, she may mull over what she's just read, saying something like, "That's so interesting! I never knew that elephants' skin wrinkles when elephants don't have water in them."

When reading nonfiction, readers will naturally question the information they are reading. For example, "How come male Emperor Penguins stay alone, keeping the egg warm on its feet for two months, with nothing to eat, while the female leaves to fish in the ocean?" Too often, however, our children's nonfiction books are filled with questions without an answer in sight. We teach our readers to not only read on seeking out answers, but also to think back over everything they've read so far and everything they already know. For example, a child might answer, "Maybe the male Emperor Penguin keeps the egg warm instead of the mother because on page 12 it says he has that big flap of fat that she doesn't have" or "Maybe the Emperor Penguin is like the sea horse and the males are the ones who are responsible for the babies until they are born."

Another way to teach students to grow thinking about the information they're reading is to encourage kids to read commenting on the text: "That's weird," "That's cool," "That's interesting," or "That's gross." Teach students to value those places in the text that draw them in, first to say in their own words what they have read, then to ask themselves a question and try to answer it by saying, "I think..." For example, if the text says, "These tiny elf owls live in the desert. They sometimes find shelter inside cactus plants," a student might say in his own words, "Elf owls are really small. They live inside holes in cactus which are found in deserts." Then he might ask, "Why do they live in cactus?" which might be answered this way: "I think elf owls live in cactus because they hold water so that would be a cool place for an owl to live."

You can also teach readers to push their thinking by looking at what the information is telling them but not saying – inferring. For example, in response to the text, "The

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whale has to come up for air,” a student might say, “The thought I had is a whale can’t breathe under water.”

When reading books on unfamiliar subjects, as is often the case with nonfiction texts, children will encounter many new words. Be prepared to help your students handle this new vocabulary. Often, after an author uses a word a reader doesn’t know, she provides clues about the meaning of the word. Sometimes children simply need to substitute the synonym and then read on. Always, after a child speculates over what a word means and reads on, he needs to think, “Is this making sense?” and to be prepared to deal with confusion over active meaning-making strategies. Teachers can help by encouraging students to use key vocabulary from the text. This is helpful even if a reader is shaky on word pronunciation and correct use. Ideally, the child who is learning about elephants will look up from the text and say, “I never knew that an elephant’s skin wrinkles when the elephant gets *dehydration*.”

Students will also profit from learning how to use text features to make sense of the text. Children need explicit instruction in order to learn to “read” illustrative portions of the text carefully (e.g. photographs, quotes, timelines, charts, and maps). Teach them to ask, “How does this diagram fit with the main ideas I’m learning?” and to look across pictures to compare, gather information, and grow ideas.

Somewhere near the end of the unit, show students that some texts are a mixture of non-narrative and narrative structure. These texts present an idea, supported by facts, and then may tell a story that relates to or illustrates the idea. Some texts like this begin with a story, a letter, a diary entry or a mini biography, and then move into expository text structures. Because texts structured in this way often can’t be broken down into boxes and bullets, we can teach children to instead treat them like photographs and quotes, asking, “What is this letter or story teaching me?” and “How does it fit with what I have been learning?” Teach children to synthesize all the information on a page or in a section by determining how all the parts of the text fit together. It is essential then to teach your students to assess a text using what they now know about expository and narrative text structures, then to use appropriate strategies for each part of the text, as well as to synthesize the whole.

Introducing Readers to *Narrative* Nonfiction

If you decide to introduce your children to *narrative* nonfiction, remember that third graders won’t need as deep an immersion in this work as fourth- and fifth-graders will. Teach *narrative* nonfiction readers to choose texts using what they know about fiction texts, and what they know about informational texts. Once you’ve taught students to choose texts wisely, you need to teach them to chunk the text, so they can monitor for comprehension by retelling parts, one at a time. Usually these chunks will be chapter chunks in a book, and section chunks in a narrative article, unless the narrative is challenging, in which case readers make smaller chunks, especially at the beginning of a text, when the world of the story is still unfamiliar. For each chunk or chapter, readers need to say, “So far, what has happened is this...and what I’ve learned is this...” Students will be more accustomed to retelling the text as a story

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than as an accumulation of ideas and information; teach them that narrative nonfiction tells a story, and that story teaches the reader both information and ideas. For instance, the story of Balto tells the story of a desperate race across Alaska to deliver medicine that could save children's lives. It also teaches the reader about how sled dogs lead and pull their teams.

Remind nonfiction readers to choose books with which they can be successful. To determine this, have them reread the first part to be sure they can retell it. They should also think about what they already know about this subject; if it's a sports biography about a basketball player, they'll need to think, "What do I already know about basketball that will help me read this book?" If it's the story of a famous dog, like Balto, they'll access their prior knowledge about dogs, and possibly even about this sled dog in Alaska. With nonfiction texts, as compared to fiction, students need to get ready to read by expecting that a given book will teach them something new about this subject.

As children read a variety of narrative nonfiction, teach them to notice that most narrative nonfiction tells the story of people and their achievements. The structure is similar in fiction. Characters interact with each other and their environments, face challenges or obstacles that the story highlights, and usually overcome these obstacles. In narrative nonfiction, the overcoming of obstacles is usually a story of why a famous person is famous, what he or she achieved and why these achievements matter. Give students some shorter narrative nonfiction as well, including some articles, so they get used to reading texts in which the narrative unfolds swiftly. Some narrative nonfiction tells the story of animals; teach students to unpack ways in which the structure of many of these texts is the same. The text will tell the story of the way these animals interact with each other and their environment, what they want and need, what gets in their way or poses dangers, and how they overcome these dangers. The stories of famous discoveries or changes in science or history may not have a main character; the object or discovery might be the main character: "The tomb of King Tut lay quiet, waiting to be opened...it had been abandoned long ago, and now no one knew it was there...."

Children can use post-its to keep track of what they're learning as the narrative progresses, and to get ready to talk to a partner about this by rereading their post-its, to say what happened in the story *and* what the story has taught them so far.

In fourth and fifth grade, we can teach children that narrative nonfiction tells a story that teaches both information and ideas. For instance, a sports biography about a famous basketball player will tell the reader an engaging story about a character who faces interesting challenges, it will teach the reader some of the intricacies of basketball, and it will probably teach the reader why this particular basketball player is famous. It will do all that explicitly. The reader will have to infer what he or she could learn from this famous basketball player; it might be some tricky basketball moves, but it's more likely to be lessons about determination or how people help each other succeed.

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If children struggle to infer from narrative nonfiction, teach them to look at important moments in the story (they know how to do this from reading fiction), looking especially at the moment they learn something new about a character, the moment a character faces an obstacle, and at moments of crisis, choice or discovery. Ask them to think hard at each of those points about what they learn; mostly, readers learn from the examples people set. To practice moving from retelling to inferring, teach them to retell the text by saying, “This text or this part is mostly about...”, and then to make a more inferential retelling by adding, “And the big new thing it teaches me is...”—or “And the big thing it teaches me that fits with what I already knew about this subject is...”

Partnership Work for All Grades

Be sure your readers have a chance to explain to their partners what they’ve learned each day. Children need opportunities to synthesize what they read by talking about their reading. Nonfiction readers read to learn; they need regular opportunities to synthesize this learning by teaching someone else. This expectation creates accountability to the text for nonfiction readers; they know they will have to explain the big ideas of the text to someone else.

By coaching nonfiction reading partnerships, you can teach students how to help each other navigate, synthesize and get through the difficult parts of nonfiction texts. Because readers are always reading nonfiction texts in order to become authorities on a topic, it’s very powerful for them to have the opportunity to teach others about what they’ve learned from the text. The most important daily work of nonfiction reading partners is for one child to get ready to explain to another, “Today, I learned...”

This reading work will work best if two children in a partnership are reading and talking about a shared topic. If you’re worried about partners sharing a topic because you don’t have duplicates of your books, rest assured that the only thing required is several texts on a topic; partners don’t need to read the same text. There will be great excitement when one book contradicts another, and this will provide opportunities for you to teach about author perspective and bias. Children will also be pleased when one text fills the gaps left by another. This is a perfect time to remind children that their own lives and areas of expertise function as yet another sort of text. If the reader is knowledgeable about a topic, his own information can contradict, add to, or elaborate on the information found in texts.

Read-Aloud

During the nonfiction unit of study, you will want to read aloud a variety of nonfiction texts, so you can provide students with opportunities to synthesize, have thoughts off the text, make connections, activate prior knowledge, and so on. You’ll also want to show them how nonfiction readers assess a text, make plans for how to read it, and begin by chunking it and moving across the sections and pages, including the pictures and diagrams. In the read-aloud, you’ll want to demonstrate how readers learn new words from the context clues and from glossaries, and demonstrate word attack strategies they use as they read nonfiction. As you read aloud, you may want to organize a chart that shows how readers synthesize and retell the text as main ideas

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and supporting information/examples. So if you're reading a book called *Owls' Nests*, you might teach children that they could try to infer the main idea of the text, so far, after reading the first page—and that the system they may use to organize these notes is a boxes-and-bullets one that looks like this:

Owls Don't Build Their Own Nests

- They move into abandoned nests.
- They live in holes in the ground.
- They live in holes in trees.

As you read, you can also use your voice to emphasize the parts where important ideas are suggested, and information is given to support these ideas. This will particularly help fifth-graders get ready to listen to nonfiction texts. You may teach students to stop and jot as they listen, following the structure they know of “I notice...” and “This makes me think...” to lead them from observing to inferring.

At some point during the unit, it makes sense to read aloud narrative nonfiction such as biographies or true stories of animals or people. Teach students to turn on their minds to listen for story structure and pay attention to character. Show them how readers of narrative nonfiction expect the text to teach them something, so they can stop and jot after parts of the story about what the story teaches so far. You will need to model this kind of thinking and inferring explicitly, as it may be new for students to listen for both how the story develops and for what they learn from it. Often they learn from people and animals who set examples of courage, perseverance, and other exemplary values.

Next, read some texts that have both non-narrative and narrative structure, such as the DK Reader, *Shark Attack*. Here you can model how readers learn that “sharks are dangerous,” from the story embedded in a text, even though the facts may contradict this. This teaches readers to pay attention to every part of the text—to what it teaches explicitly through clear statements, and what it gets us to feel, through the power of the story.

Unit 4 – Maintaining a Varied and Independent Reading Life, and Getting Ready To Demonstrate Reading Skills on the Reading Tests

*December/
Early
January*

How We'll Use Our Time

The first thing to remember as we prepare students for state reading tests is that the tests are, in fact, reading tests. They test the level at which a child can read with strong comprehension, and, in most states including New York, they test the child's rate as well—the pace at which they may read with strong comprehension. Children who read at high reading levels with pretty solid reading rates, as in they read with stamina and fluency, do well. Children who read below grade level, or read so slowly that they take an unusually long time to finish books and texts, perform poorly on

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state tests. So the best preparation for state tests is to teach your students to be stronger readers.

Protected reading time helps students become stronger readers. Differentiated, assessment-based large and small group instruction helps them become independent with reading strategies. Access to texts they find fascinating engages them as readers. That's what they need the most. Don't substitute half an hour filling out a worksheet that has 50 words on it, for half an hour where a student may have read 40 pages of a book. They need to keep reading texts they can read. They need to engage with density of print. Ultimately, the test will test their flexibility, knowledge, and stamina as a reader.

Therefore, students need a protected half hour of independent reading, where they continue to read the books they choose, every day, if they are to maintain their rate and level of reading. Students who read below grade level continue to need more time than this for independent reading, and will need support in getting this time outside of class, either at home, in extended day, or in intervention programs.

This unit has a number of overlapping purposes, including getting students ready to read and answer questions about a variety of short texts for the test, and helping children sustain a high volume of just-right reading. Teachers need to plan their time carefully to support the independent reading, test prep, and writing-about-reading work that students need during this unit. One way to do this is to have a *reading/test prep workshop*, in which we teach how to read, talk about, and answer questions about short test-like texts, as well as multiple choice strategies; a *writing workshop*, in which we teach quick purposeful writing, especially writing about reading and writing for the test; and a separate time for *independent reading*, when students continue to read just-right chapter books. To maintain independent reading time and insert something new such as time for test prep demands, something may change in the students' schedules. Some schools protect their reading time during class and do their test prep during extended day or after school. Some schools have their independent reading time during a protected block and do their test prep in class. Some schools substitute test prep or independent reading for some of their social studies work for the few weeks of this unit.

To begin, be sure to keep up with reading logs and protected reading time. It's too long a time across this unit of study to have students reading only short and often hard texts; this could be very dangerous to such young readers. It is often helpful to launch children into partnered reading of series books, if possible, so they can work on their reading with each other, with books they enjoy. It's not enough to say that children will simply read at home. Few children will read for homework unless they start that reading and have some opportunities to talk to a partner in the classroom. Young readers need to read for long stretches of time, in order to keep up their stamina, reading rate, and fluency. The tests are normed to the reading rate at which children read fiction; they can only sustain this rate by continuing to develop their skills and pace on narrative texts.

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Dangers: Don't think that test prep counts as independent reading, and don't give up what you know about working on leveled texts during the test prep! Students do not need practice reading texts they don't understand and cannot read—not reading doesn't prepare a student any better for not reading. Not understanding doesn't help prepare them to not understand. They don't need practice at that—kids get too much time, lamentably, to experience texts they don't understand and have no access to. What they need is time to read. Kids who have had a lot of access across their reading lives in school, to realistic and historical fiction, fables and folktales, memoir, biographies, science and history articles, will not be surprised by what they encounter on the test. They can also benefit from understanding the tasks of the test, and being coached to use reading strategies they know to tackle these tasks.

There are some common skills that help students tackle any text, as well as the ones of the test—including previewing the text to ascertain its subject and structure, making a quick reading plan and chunking the text into manageable chunks, reading across these chunks using strategies to summarize, to synthesize, and to cope with difficulty. There will be a slightly different emphasis on what particular strategies students will use in reading and answering multiple choice questions. For instance, they cannot use the strategy of finding an easier text to help them on the day of the test, nor can they build prior knowledge by reading related texts, nor can they reject texts because they are boring or irrelevant to them. Students can, however, use a bundle of strategies to access schema that will help them move through these texts and the commonly asked questions that follow them. The goal of this unit is to help students realize and sharpen the strategies they know, coach them in making smart decisions about accessing strategies, and increase their familiarity with common text structures and test tasks so that they are flexible and resilient readers on the day of the test.

Getting Ready – Assembling Materials for Test Prep

It's rather a nightmare, really, assembling test prep materials, which is why schools sometimes purchase test prep materials from commercial companies. Our experience is that the schools where students have made the strongest improvements and have held these gains, are schools where kids: Are assessed often and benefit from small group work; have protected independent reading time; get extra time outside of ELA for reading or strategy work; and use home-made test prep materials that are leveled and matched to (and emerge from) their reading work and community. Thus, some of the texts will be typed up picture books or short stories that have been used for read alouds, or articles that students worked on in class, and students will learn to fulfill the tasks of the test first on these familiar texts.

Here's how we prepared materials this year in conjunction with schools: We learned to take a text such as a short story, article, or poem, and to make a series of test-like questions to go with the text. We put these questions always in the same order, such as the first question will be a main idea question, and the second question will be a vocabulary in context question. The third question will be about mood/emotion/tone, and the fourth a genre question, etc. Then we made these same kinds of questions for

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a variety of levels of texts—for instance, a story at a J-K level, a story at a M-N level, a story at a P-Q level. Thus, teachers can track how a student is doing on particular kinds of reading work, at each level. This helps us because it may not be that a student can't answer main idea questions, it may be that he can only answer them successfully until the text is over level N. Then we know both what level of texts to teach him to practice on, and that over that level, he doesn't need main idea help, he needs some strategies for reading too-hard texts, such as skimming, summarizing, underlining, jotting, using the pictures and headings if there are any. We can teach him those, as well as sharpen his main idea strategies, try him again on the texts, and see if he's doing better with main idea and with that level.

Getting Started on Familiar Texts

For the upcoming ELA, it is helpful for students to become accustomed to moving between reading fiction and non-fiction texts, so they become flexible readers who can quickly assess a text, figure out what kind of text it is, and rally the reading strategies they know to read the text successfully. To prepare for this unit, teachers will need examples of leveled, high-interest short texts, including fiction, non-fiction (both narrative and non-narrative), and poetry. Good sources for these are *Cobblestone* and *Cricket*. These should include texts used in read-aloud or shared reading from earlier in the year. Teachers will also need examples that are just like the ELA the students will take.

Until now, the reading workshop has been organized so that children have been reading either a great many narrative or a great many expository texts, with instruction which teaches or reminds them of the appropriate strategies for that genre. Now you will need a collection of short texts from diverse genres for every ability-level of reader. Because you'll need to also help your struggling readers negotiate test-level texts (which will be considerably too hard for them), the collections of texts you create for strugglers will need to include not only texts at their levels, but also a few test-level short texts from a range of genres. (A word of caution: While it might be tempting to think that strugglers need lots of practice reading too-hard texts, the evidence is overwhelming that they can't and don't read these. The last thing these readers need is to spend the month prior to the ELA working with texts they can't read!) As you design packets that resemble the ELA, keep in mind that the non-fiction portion of the fourth to eighth grade tests often includes narrative non-fiction, such as biography. They almost always include a historical and a scientific text. Often there will be some kind of how-to or similarly sequenced text. The fiction portion is usually moralistic; often one of these selections will be a fable, folktale, or other story with a clear moral lesson. Another will usually be realistic or historical fiction. There is usually a poem. Sometimes a memoir is included. In most grades, there is usually a folktale or fairytale, a realistic fiction, a and then a range of non-narrative non-fiction such as how-to's, all-about articles, and (above third grade) narrative science and historical articles and biography.

Most teachers find that they could do a lot of their test preparation—in which they introduce the kinds of questions that will be asked, and teach students how to infer the

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answers from the texts—on short texts with which students are already familiar. In all grades, you may wish to introduce this work with short fiction, then move to close reading of informational or non-narrative nonfiction, which is usually easier, then move to narrative non-fiction: Short biographies, memoirs, success stories, as well as other kinds of narratives such as fables, allegories, and folktales. Then you may introduce some poetry. In this way, you can teach students that the strategies of close reading, which include paying attention to character, detail, imagery, and structure, reading for meaning and ideas, building an understanding of what the text says explicitly and inferring what it suggests as bigger meanings or lessons, are the same across genres.

After you've made your ELA-like packets, then teach the children to read and talk about them, to become familiar with the kinds of questions that will be asked. Write questions for these leveled texts that resemble the kinds of questions they will be asked on the ELA. Teach children to practice answering these questions, supporting their answers with evidence from the texts. After they've returned to the text and predicted an answer, demonstrate how to read the answers to the multiple choice responses, opting from among them.

Students are easily confused by multiple choice answers (that's the point of the distracters); it's important to teach them to construct a text-based response first, before revealing the possible answers. For a day or two, you could teach them to write answers to questions without showing them any answers; then teach them to cover the answers, go back to the text and predict the answer based on their understanding, then match their prediction to the answer choices.

Students benefit from doing this work first in partnerships, on accessible texts, then moving on to texts that look like the ELA texts. It's helpful if students are allowed to write on their texts as they will on the ELA: to annotate them by underlining important places where we learn something about the character, jotting in the margins the problems characters face, where they change, or the big ideas of sections of articles. It's also helpful if they spend a day or two underlining or starring the part of the text where they found or inferred their answer, so they can talk to a partner about how they're answering questions, and so you can see what they're doing and coach them. For instance, a student may underline where he or she found or inferred the answer to question #3, and write a 3 in the margin there; then you can see what he or she is doing. This also helps train students to go back to the text.

Working on More Dense ELA-Like Texts

After a short period with familiar, accessible short texts, with which you can teach students what kinds of questions are asked, and coach them to construct text-based responses, show students how to do the same kind of work on short, dense texts, including the kind of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry that will be on the test.

They can use the same strategies of marking the text, predicting, writing the answer and then matching it to the choices. To begin to be ready to answer these questions, they need to know what to pay attention to as they read. You will want to teach your

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children that they can be guided in their reading by their knowledge of what kind of text is in front of them. If it's a narrative text, readers expect to pay attention to and infer about characters: What kind of people characters are, what challenges they face, how they overcome these challenges, how they change, their achievements, the lessons they learn and teach us as readers. If it's a non-narrative text, readers may expect to pay attention to and infer from the structure, headings, and topic sentences; what the text teaches us, the big ideas; and the evidence it uses to support those big ideas. If the text is a poem, readers may expect to pay attention to what the big meaning of the poem could be, what it is mostly about, what it demonstrates or teaches, as well as to imagery and figurative language within the poem. In all texts, for all grades, readers consider the author's purpose: What the author wants to teach us or wants us to feel. In all texts, there may be unfamiliar words, and readers need to envision the subject of the text—what the text teaches or what happens in that part—to get a general sense of the meaning of the word.

On the ELA, after reading the fiction and biography texts, students will probably be asked to answer questions about who the person is in the story. What kind of person is this, what does he or she want, what does he or she accomplish? Children may also be asked to answer a question about the setting. They may need to infer a lesson from the story. They will probably answer a question about how the character changes, and how that change happens. They may need to infer the character's point of view or perspective.

After reading the non-fiction text, children will probably be asked to answer questions about the purpose or main idea of the article. They may be asked to provide evidence to support the author's argument, or to differentiate between fact and opinion. They may need to identify the genre, and know where they would expect to find it. For both fiction and non-fiction they will probably be asked the meaning of a vocabulary word in context. For poetry selections, they will probably need to answer a question about the overall interpretation or meaning of the poem, as well as the meaning or symbolism of a part, or a line. They may have to answer a question about figurative language such as personification, simile, or metaphor.

Teaching Students To Deal with Difficulty

You will certainly want to teach children ways of dealing with difficulty. Even just-right texts pose puzzles. Too often, children create one idea about a text and then read on, continuing to hold to that one idea even when all the upcoming text points to the fact that their initial idea was wrong. Reading is a process of revision for us all; readers need to realize that as we move forward in a text, we are also constantly going backwards in our minds to realign what we thought the text said with what we are now uncovering. Jotting notes or headings in the margins helps students just refer to summaries rather than reread the text, which they won't have time to do. You may worry about these strategies, thinking, "Children will never have time to do this self-correcting when they're in exam conditions." This is true. But the revision-of-reading work that children do now can influence their first-draft, on-the-run reading as they

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go forward. If a child realizes she misread because she imagined that an extraneous detail was the main idea, the next time she reads she'll be less apt to do this.

As you approach the test, you also teach students to skim texts that are very hard for them, to summarize as they go for main idea, to move past hard words unless there are questions that refer to those words, and to only dig into hard parts if they need to in order to answer a question. It's important the children learn to read on, to keep going and to not get demoralized when the text is too hard. They don't need too much practice with this, as it is, in fact, demoralizing. Teach them strategies for eliminating answer choices, teach them to move on because they may do better on the next text.

When teaching children to deal with difficulty, you'll want to help them to deal with unknown and scary words. Because this work will occur on the brink of the test, now is probably not the best time to teach readers to persevere over those difficult words to make a stab at pronouncing them. Instead, for now, you will probably want to teach children to substitute a synonym or best-guess understanding and to keep on reading. You may want to encourage them to underline the difficult word also, letting them know that when they reach the end of the passage, they can go back and tackle that word if necessary. The one time children will be most apt to do this is when there is a question on the test which says, "In line 16, what does the word 'blah blah' mean?" Keep in mind that to answer that question, children do not need to pronounce the word. The vocabulary work you will do just prior to the ELA will be more synonym- and contextual-clue-based because of the oncoming test. Most of the words children need to answer questions about can be decoded by thinking about what's happening in that part of the story or article.

As students approach the test, you can also teach them specific multiple-choice strategies such as monitoring time by figuring out how many questions there are and how many minutes they have, and strategies for elimination. You'll also want to teach them how to mark their answer sheet and avoid skipping any questions as they go. Teach them to return to questions they were unsure of if they have time at the end, and to keep going! This kind of teaching and learning is not invigorating and can only be sustained for a few weeks, so do it intensely but briefly.

Read-Aloud

When you read aloud as part of test prep, you'll want to read aloud texts that can be read in one sitting. The read aloud will also be different in structure—it will be "getting them oriented to the text and their job" rather than "think aloud." Thus, we prompt readers for what their listening and thinking work that is upcoming is, rather than demonstrate that after reading. Start with narratives. Choose the kinds of stories that appear on the test, including realistic and historical fiction, fables, fairy tales, allegorical folktales, and biographies.

For the fiction and fable read alouds, teach students to get ready to listen by thinking about what they know about how stories go, and about their jobs as readers—they are mostly listening for: *Character, problem, solution*. Set them up to listen, paying

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attention right away to details about the setting, and to clues about *who* the story is mostly about. Readers need to have their minds turned on as they read. Show them how much information comes right at the start of a story. Say, “Get ready to listen for who is in the story and what you know about them, that’s a reader’s job when a story begins.” Read and let them talk. Say, “Stories give you lots of details such as what people do and say, that let you infer about what they’re like – get ready to say something about what kind of person the main character seems to be and why.” Read and talk. Say, “In almost all stories, one of the reader’s jobs is to recognize the big challenges a character faces. Get ready to say something about the problem or challenge the main character faces.” Read and talk. Say, “Sometimes in stories, the reader can also infer what emotions the character is probably feeling, based on what they do or say or what happens to them. Get ready to say something about what you think the character is feeling.” Read and talk. Say, “readers also know that the problem the character faces is usually solved. But the harder work is to say *how* the problem is solved. Get ready to say to your partner after the next bit, *how* the problem is solved.” Read and talk. Finally, say, “many stories teach readers lessons. One way they do that is that the main character learns a lesson and we learn it at the same time. Another is when we learn from the example the character sets. Get ready to say what lesson this story teaches, and be ready to back up your talk with examples from the story.”

Teach them, as the story progresses, that their job is to *listen and to learn about the main character*. Teach them to use the details of what characters say and do to infer about character traits, relationships, and motivation. For example, as they read, they should be asking themselves, “Why do people do the things they do in this story?” As the story continues, help children pay attention to the challenges characters face. Finally, by the end of the story, they need to notice how *people and situations have changed*, and be ready to say what caused these changes. Reviewing the whole story in their minds, they may also reflect on the lessons that characters learn and teach. For biographies and success-stories, which may be narrative nonfiction, they need to listen for: *What the character accomplishes, what made it hard or got in the way, and how they overcame these difficulties*.

The first time you do this read-aloud, remind students of their jobs as readers, and prompt them to listen for clues about the setting and the characters. After the first section of the story, encourage partners to turn and talk, and listen for how they may need coaching. Similarly, you might pause in the middle of the story, coaching students to turn and talk about what they’ve learned about the characters, relationships, and the challenges the characters face. As you get ready to read the end of the story, prompt students to turn their minds on, listening for how people change and how problems are solved; then give them an opportunity again to turn and talk about these inferences. Finally, coach them to infer possible lessons the story teaches, and to talk about the author’s possible purposes. The next time you read aloud, have students talk to a partner beforehand, reviewing what they know about how stories go and what they need to pay attention to as they listen. Continue to interrupt the story for them to turn and talk at appropriate intervals. Next time, move them to stop and jot their responses, and finally to jot responses to ELA-like short-

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answer questions. This way the read-aloud helps prepare students both for the listening selection, in explicitly teaching them to listen with their minds turned on, and to hold a story in their heads, and for the multiple choice, as they listen and come to expect predictable questions.

Because read aloud will help students with both the listening selection and the multiple choice, be sure to read aloud some nonfiction, teaching students to expect that a non-fiction text is going to teach them something. In narrative non-fiction there will be characters in the text; so they need to use what they know about story (paying attention to characters, including the obstacles they face, and their achievements) and what they know about non-fiction (looking for the specific idea it teaches, and how the story demonstrates the idea). You'll want your test prep read-aloud to include narrative non-fiction for grades that will encounter more of this structure, about sports, historical, and scientific figures, and fiction and narrative non-fiction where the character is an animal. These are common occurrences on the test.

This kind of read aloud of nonfiction might look like this: Tell readers “you know that when you listen to or read an article, the first thing you do, without reading any of the text, is to say what you expect this article to be about. We do that by paying attention to the title and to any introduction. Get ready to say to a partner what you expect this article to be about.” Say, “Readers, you know that one of the surprising things about articles is that the title doesn’t actually tell us the big thing the article is going to teach us about— it’s often more of a hook. So once we start reading, we have to figure out a big thing that the article is teaching us. But I’ll warn you—often the article starts with some kind of story just to get you interested—that’s called a lead. Listen for the lead in this article and be ready to say to your partner how the lead gets you interested.” Read, let them talk.

Say, “Ok, we agree that this article starts with a lead, and an interesting title, and we *still* don’t know exactly what the article is going to teach us—the main idea of it. So get ready to figure it out as I read the next part. There’s two strategies you know—you can say what it’s mostly about, and you can try to figure out what the big thing is that the article is teaching you about.” Read, let them talk.

Say, “Readers, now we’ve named a big thing that article is teaching us. Next, we need to be able to give some examples or parts or supporting details to support this idea. For instance, in this article we need to be able to say some examples about how to stand up to bullies. Get ready to listen and then say to a partner a few examples.” Read, let them talk.

Say, “Readers, at the end of an article, we need to think back over the whole article and say to ourselves: What’s the big thing this author wanted me to know or think? What was his or her purpose in writing this? Turn to your partner and reflect about what you learned from this article, and what you think the author’s purpose was.”

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Struggling and Emergent Readers—Decoding

Many of our struggling and emergent readers struggle to decode and comprehend reading test passages that tend to be above some of their reading levels. If you're noticing some of your readers are still having a hard time working through difficult texts, you probably need to decide if more work needs to be done with decoding.

When children encounter a hard word to decode or comprehend, they can anticipate what the word should sound like and/or mean, then check it against what they see. Make sure they understand how to orchestrate the sources of information, so they check to make sure their word work during reading looks right (relies on graphophonic clues), sounds right (relies on syntax), and makes sense (relies on semantics). Teach them not to ignore or pass by tricky words or tricky parts in the short text packets, test prep packets, and their own reading books. Instead, help them learn strategies to be active meaning-makers as they read.

Most importantly, we need to remind our students constantly to be flexible word solvers, using more than one strategy more than one time, without losing a standard pacing through any one text. Once students figure out a word, they need to be taught to reread, putting the word back into context so its meaning isn't lost. Rereading is always highly encouraged for children who are having decoding issues; yet on a test, they must also read through the whole passage for the best possible comprehension. Before the test, you might have students have a book in their baggie each week from which they reread passages or chapters in order to read with more automaticity and fluency, so that in the crunch of test time, they feel more comfortable with rereading quickly.

Vocabulary Enriching

For many students who start reading harder texts, that are full of literary or book language such as rich, unusual words that we don't encounter every day in our social interactions with peers and families, the language of the tests poses many challenges. The test values and assesses familiarity with book language. Often a student may understand a question, such as "how is the character feeling in this part?" And she or he may correctly predict an answer, such as, "nervous." But they won't recognize the word given in the answer, which may be "apprehensive" or "anxious." They'll know the character is a brave person but won't recognize "courageous."

We can't teach effectively, in the weeks before the test, all the words that students may encounter. But we can make an effort to enhance students' familiarity with book language, and to broaden the range of words they recognize and know how to use. One way teachers and students did this last year was to create word walls of words that describe characters. These words were sorted into categories, such as words that describe *happy*, *sad*, *brave*, *mad*, *scared*, *mean*, *kind*, etc. Underneath these headings, teachers and students put up words that mean mostly the same thing. Such as *frustrated*, *upset*, *enraged*, for *mad*. If we sort the words from least to most, as in, put the words that mean a little mad at the top of the list, and more mad at the bottom, that visual cue can help students sort out the graduated meanings of these words.

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We're not looking for students to learn dictionary meanings of these words, but to see, and hear, and try using a wider variety of literary words.

Some ways teachers and students used these word walls—during read aloud, a teacher may use them in her think aloud, she may pause and say, I imagine Oliver is feeling, let's see, “apprehensive,” right now. The teacher may also prompt students to use these words in their partner conversations during read aloud – they may talk about how the character is feeling, using words from the word wall. When you do this, you'll find that students prompt for more categories of words, as they seek words that mean “proud,” and “shy,” etc.

Students can also use these words on the post-its they jot about their independent reading books—if they keep occasional post-its that track what a character is feeling, they can revise or add to these post-its, using words from the word wall. When students write about reading either in their readers' notebooks, or as they learn to write literary essays or in getting ready to write about reading for the test, they can revise this writing using more literary language to describe characters.

Ways to extend the word wall work include: Keeping word walls in social studies and science of the words that are related to each unit of study; keeping a word wall of words that describe stories and nonfiction, such as “engaging, interesting, fascinating, disturbing, provocative, lively, fast-paced, informative, action-packed, etc.”

Unit 5 - Reading with Close Comprehension: Genre-Based Clubs (Or, If Necessary, Partnerships)

February

There are compelling reasons for the sequence of study described up until this point in the year, but from this point on, the sequence is more a matter of personal preference. We do recommend that at this time in the year, children profit from the opportunity to work in book clubs rather than simply in partnerships. We think it is a good idea for your first cycle of clubs to be heavily scaffolded—this is easier if all the book clubs throughout a class are engaged in the same inquiry (rather than children having the chance to create their own book club around a shared interest.) Genre-based clubs are fairly easy to lead and are almost always successful. But you could decide to teach instead, a unit on Personal Response and Book Clubs (we will put a graduate student's overview of such a unit on our web-site) or a Unit on Interpretation and Book Clubs.

At least in New York State schools, this unit follows a month of test-prep and testing, so it is absolutely essential that children are reading books, not short texts (they will have had too many of those in the preceding month.) It is also essential that they are reading a vast quantity, so be sure that whatever you teach, your teaching and book clubs conversations do not combine to overwhelm time for actual reading.

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You may find that children don't seem warmed up enough to start book clubs right away. Their abilities to talk about books may have grown rusty over the past few weeks, and even their stamina could need some shoring up. If it seems difficult to make the transition from reading tests to book clubs overnight, you might begin this unit with a tiny stretch of time for returning to one's independent reading life, while working in partnerships. Then you can ratchet up the levels of your readers' partnership work and launch clubs in a staggered fashion, with first one club starting, then another, another. The clubs could, at first, be for reading shared texts of any sort. Just don't wait long before starting clubs; clubs can work magic in classrooms!

Overview of Book Clubs

In a book club, members usually read duplicate copies of the same books, progressing through the texts in sync with each other. This means that members of any club need to be fairly well-matched by reading level. The groups profit if members are diverse by gender, ethnicity, and ability to engage in book talks. Usually teachers combine several partnerships to form a club, with four and occasionally six members. Sometimes, however, for one reason or another, a group of children has a hard time working together or staying in sync as readers, and it's not unheard of for a club of four readers to become two clubs of two readers. And some clubs are twosomes from the start.

Book clubs are more challenging than partnerships for a number of reasons. First, the conversation relies on members having read to the same point in their texts. This means that members of a club need to make and keep deadlines, saying, "By Wednesday, let's read up to Chapter Six." Book clubs, then, provide us with another opportunity to push our readers to read more. Since clubs set deadlines, teachers can check to see if their deadlines are aligned with Dick Allington's research. Are children reading a short stack of Level M books in a week, and at least one, sometimes two, level T books in a week? If not, then be aware that your reading curriculum may be getting in the way of your kids' reading development, which would be tragic! Members can only keep pace with each other if children are regularly carrying books between home and school, devoting time most evenings to reading.

Book clubs also rely upon children being able to develop an idea while reading the book at home, jotting the idea down, then bringing it to school the next day, to the conversation. If your children have not yet become accustomed to writing as a way to capture their own ideas, if they're not holding on to their ideas in this fashion, you may decide that the class isn't ready for book clubs; you might instead design a writing-about-reading and partnership unit, geared to helping children read and make notes which they then share within a partnership. If you want to help children use writing as a way to think about reading, and to move between writing and talking about reading, you may institute a ritual of giving readers a bit of time after they've read and before they talk to look over the text and review their notes, in order to "get ready for their talk."

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We recommend that third graders read either mysteries or series books in this unit. Conceivably, you might decide for them to read biographies, although upcoming units are more tailored to that genre. More proficient readers have a wider array of choices including historical fiction and fantasy. Once most of the members of the class are in an ability based club, you can start the work your genre of choice.

How Read-Aloud Can Support Talk During Book Clubs (and Partnerships)

We hope that all year long you've read aloud and involved children in interactive book talks afterwards. If you haven't done a lot of work with whole-class conversations around the read-aloud book, highlight these now and begin this unit with partnerships rather than clubs. If you haven't done much work with whole-class conversations, see Unit 2 for help with how to get these started.

The read-aloud work you do in this unit will probably revolve around 3-4 read-aloud texts of varied lengths and in the genre the class is studying. Think aloud early in your work with the text to clear up confusion and to point out the elements of that specific genre. Once you are into the text, you can plan turn-and-talk prompts that help students grow some ideas they can then accumulate across the text.

In order to participate in book clubs successfully, children should be able to extend an idea with conversational prompts such as, "I agree with...", "Another example is...", or "To add on..." They should value debate and be able to question each other's claims, asking, "Where do you see evidence of that?" and saying, "On the other hand..."

If you're moving your students into clubs right away in this unit, you may try to have them sit with their book club members during read-aloud time. When they turn and talk, they can now do so with their club members, getting yet another opportunity during the day to talk with each other. This also gives you another chance to coach them as they talk within their club. We often feel constricted in our book club conferences when we aren't familiar with the texts students are reading—the fact that we know the read-aloud book under discussion helps us feel more effective in our coaching.

It's not hard to teach children to stay with and elaborate on each other's ideas in a whole-class conversation. As noted before, try transcribing parts of their talk and then using the transcript as a teaching tool. During a minilesson, you can ask children to learn from a particular strength in the transcript, and a particular need as well. Of course, as children become more skilled at talking about the read-aloud, you'll want to be sure they're talking in similar ways in their partner or book club conversations.

It's really important that in the book clubs in your class, children are accumulating information within and across their shared texts. Encourage club members to ask, "How does my knowledge of this character build from one page to the next, one chapter to the next? What other texts have I read in my life that can help me understand these texts?"

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You may also encourage children to use clubs as a time to explore vocabulary that they do not understand. Harvey suggests keeping a club word-list, with children collaborating to develop definitions for the words they collect, then trying to thread those same words through their book talks. Certainly, you'll encourage the class to draw on the word chart described earlier, containing specific words for character traits.

Launching Clubs

You'll need to plan ways to support your readers with the challenges posed by book clubs, and you'll also need to support them with the challenges posed by the topic of this unit: a genre-based reading. In this write-up, the topics are addressed separately, but in your teaching, you'll need to work on both simultaneously. Often people use minilessons as a time to support reading skills, woven into the specifics of genre-based reading, and mid-workshops as a time to support talking and writing about texts.

As mentioned earlier, you may decide to move gradually from partners to clubs or you may launch the class into clubs on one day. Either way, you'll need to decide how to divide up the reading workshop time. Will all children be talking at the same time and reading at the same time (which helps noise but lessens your chances to support their talking)? Or will you stagger the schedule so a limited number of clubs meets at any one time? You'll also need to decide how much time to give to talk versus reading. If children are reading forty-five minutes each night, you can devote as much as 30% of the reading workshop to talk. If they aren't reading that much at home, you'll need to reserve more class time for reading.

One system that works well is for clubs to meet for the second half of the reading workshop two or three days a week, with the minilesson supporting the reading work, perhaps of inference and interpretation, and the mid-workshop teaching point and supporting the book clubs.

For more suggestions and details about establishing book clubs in your reading workshops, see Chapter 20 in Calkins' *The Art of Teaching Reading*.

The Genre Study

Your first decision will be the genre you and the children will explore. Your class could read mystery, adventure, realistic fiction, biography, historical fiction, or fantasy. We do not recommend poetry or short texts as children need to be reading a lot of quantity. Your next decision is content. What is it you aim to teach? That is, if you invite your whole class to spend the month engaged in a shared study of a genre, keep in mind that although the children will think the focus on the unit is on a kind of text—say, mysteries—you will know that your real goal is to promote the reading skills, strategies and habits that will help children whenever they read anything. That is, a unit on mysteries gives you a wonderful chance to teach readers to read closely, collecting and synthesizing clues...and this is how a reader reads any book, not just a mystery. A unit on historical fiction gives you a chance to teach readers to synthesize

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elements of story, thinking not just about the setting but about how the setting effects the characters and the plot....and this work of is universally important for all readers of stories. Before your genre-based work begins, then, you need to decide on the reading skills you plan to highlight within the unit of study.

Historical Fiction: Building the World of a Story, Envisionment, Discerning Cause and Effect, Critique

When children read historical fiction, you will probably teach them to pay attention to the setting, using text clues to figure out and to envision where and when the story is taking place. In historical fiction, readers need to pay attention to every detail to construct the world of the story. Readers can also do the work described in Unit 1 and 2 and imagine the places, people and events of the story. They can read, picturing what this place looks like, including what people are wearing, what buildings look like, what they know about the environment. As part of this, you will probably want them to pay attention to any big historical conflict that serves as a backdrop to the story. Teach them to figure out the main character's relationship to this conflict, and to also notice other characters' relationships to the conflict. This work entails close reading.

In historical fiction, there may be unfamiliar terms and words. You may need to help children figure out these words by envisioning what's happening in that part of the story, using what they know to help them find a synonym for the challenging term. The difficult words will reappear repeatedly across the story and this repetition helps readers construct meanings that makes sense and helps them absorb new words into their own vocabularies.

Remind teachers that fiction is generally constructed around a character who faces a challenge. To understand a character and her problems readers need to accumulate and synthesize information about this particular place, during this particular time in history, and readers need to understand how the historical context is affecting the main character. In the context in which *Freedom Summer* is set, for instance, it is perhaps not surprising that John Henry Waddell's older brother Will Rogers doesn't speak in the whole of the story, not even when he is ordered to drain the town pool and to cover it up with blacktop. You may want to teach students to think about ways in which an understanding of the stories setting can help them supply reasons for events. In historical fiction, the setting and the character help supply readers with causes. Although children can spend time discussing whether they would have made the same decisions as their characters' made, it is important for children to find reasons within the text, and the context, for all that transpires. While a student may at first say, "Oh, I would never have done that. I would have put my shovel down. I would have tried to stop it from happening," later, you can help them walk in Will's shoes. You can help them realize that the consequence of Will protesting would have been that he'd be fired, arrested or hung.

As your students look closely at the particular problems a character encounters, they'll find that these problems relate to issues central to the era in which a story is

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set. Sometimes these problems are still with us today, in different guises; it may be productive for clubs to discuss their own shifting experiences with, and understanding of, these problems and issues.

In turn-and-talk you might say something like:

- “So the main character is facing a big problem. Turn and talk to your club, how do you think she may try to solve it?”
- “Hmm, I’m thinking that if I were this character in this situation, I might have done something different. Stop and jot what you would do, keep in mind what we know about that time.”
- “So far we’ve gathered a lot of details about the setting! Stop and jot, how do you think the setting is affecting the main character?”
- “How do you think what just happened will affect the character? Turn and tell your partner.”

Biography: Building the World of the Story, Determining Importance, Discerning Cause and Effect, Intertextuality (Text-to-Text Connections)

You will need to decide what reading skills you hope to advance if your children are reading biography. You may, for example, decide to teach children that just as readers approach a *story* with some sense for how that book is apt to go and therefore pay special attention to the crescendo-ing problem, so, too, readers approach *any* kind-of-text thinking, ‘How does the kind-of-text usually go?’ If readers look across several biographies, they will probably discover that these texts usually tell about an accomplished person, starting with childhood and highlighting the early beginnings of the person’s later claim to fame. Biographies are not entirely different from stories. For example, they often reveal struggles that define the person, challenges he or she had to meet, showing ways in which the person drew on his or her own resources to meet those challenges. Readers of biographies, like readers of stories, will want to develop theories about the characters they meet in these texts. Readers of stories already know that it is helpful to pay attention to the important events and decisions in a character’s life, and to recognize that a person’s response to those events, for example, often reveals his or her traits. Just as readers of *fiction* pay attention to the details of characters, so too must readers of *biographies*. And just as readers of *fiction* learn to grow ideas, so, too, readers of *biographies* need to do this. Then, too, biography readers, like fiction readers, may want to study secondary characters. Secondary characters influence the main character in any story—this concept takes on new life when the character is a historical figure and the secondary character is that person’s mother, teacher, or child. By teaching readers to notice the relationships between people in biographies, we can teach them to think about cause and effect as they read any text.

Although in many ways, children need to learn that reading biographies is very much like reading fiction, in other ways, this sort of reading can draw children towards the world of nonfiction reading. Biographies, like most nonfiction texts, are best read cumulatively. A single biography is interesting, but that book takes on exponentially more meaning when it is laid beside a second biography about the same person or even a second biography about a different person who was, in some ways, similar.

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Clubs may then read across biographies. They might read the biographies of several freedom fighters—of both Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Alternatively, members of a club may read more than one biography about the same person. When readers put two books alongside each other that seem similar, help them to talk, think and read across the texts. For example, students might notice that one biography highlighted different events in the person's life than does the other biography. In one book, the author may write about events in such a way so as to portray Martin Luther King, Jr. as a hero to the civil rights movement; in another book, the author may portray King as a victim of ignorance and hate. Clubs can draw theories based on noticing the important events some authors include and others leave out. What does each author want us to see in the person? These conversations help students see the characters of biographies as multifaceted and not one-dimensional.

In turn-and-talk you might say something like:

- “I can’t believe what just happened! Why would he do something like that? Ummm... I’m going to read that part carefully again.” Then, “Turn and talk about what caused him to act that way.”
- “Hmmm. The character seems to be feeling really upset. Why is she feeling this way?”
- “This part is reminding me of another book I read. Turn and tell your partner what it reminds you of.”

Fantasy: Envisionment, Monitoring for Sense, Identification with Characters, Synthesis

As you approach this unit, you might be tempted to pull out a textbook on children's literature, one which is loaded with definitions and lists. Children's literature books---and the people who have read them—are full of talk about the different kinds of fantasy stories, the different kinds of heroes, the different elements in all fantasy stories and so forth and so on. Be careful! You are not teaching a children's literature course! You are teaching reading. Your goal is not for children to know all about components and kinds of fantasy stories. Instead, your goal is for fantasy books to help your children become hooked on reading. Your goal is the Harry Potter Phenomenon all over again. You are hoping that your whole class can become enthralled by fantasy books, reading them in great gulps, reading them all day long and by flashlight after they are supposed to be in bed.

These curricular calendars are rewritten every year because all the best ideas that this Thought Collaborative can invent will still, inevitably, create their own problems. This write-up on a fantasy unit is very different than last year's. Last year, we dished out some of the terms and facts about fantasy. But as a result, in some classes we've seen every child sitting around making complex charts on the components of fantasy stories, charts which involve huge amounts of copying (under the auspices of gathering evidence) and which involve one child writing on and on and on while three other club members sit passively watching.

Teachers, become accustomed to looking at your own classroom during reading time, asking, ‘Is this what real readers—people in my life who love reading and are good at

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it—do when they read? If not, is this bringing my kids a whole lot closer, anyhow, to doing what real readers do?’ If your answer is no, then you need to revise your teaching. It is a very big problem if our teaching of fantasy gets in the way of kids reading fantasy! It is a very big problem if our teaching of fantasy prevents fantasy books from working their magic.

So begin by thinking of your goals. Certainly you want this unit to lure children into huge gobs of reading. You no doubt want them to understand that lots of readers of fantasy books carry those books with them always, reading them in stolen moments all day long, reading vastly more in a day than they have ever read. Lots of times, fantasy readers are series readers. We often read the books in sequence (largely because we are always waiting for the next to be released, and when it is we rush to get hold of it.) Why not start your unit by talking about the world-wide phenomenon of Harry Potter? Tell children that Harry Potter books are not all that unique after all, for they instead represent a phenomenon of our times.

Then you need to decide which reading skills you want to develop in this unit, and to be sure that you assess those skills several times in the unit so that your teaching is deliberately designed to support skill development. Of course you can teach envisionment within this unit. If you wish to assess your kids abilities to envision prior to the unit, you may want to acquire the Higher Level Comprehension Assessments the Project has developed (check our website.) That is, dozens of teachers have helped the TCRWP take three stories (at Levels K, R, and V) and insert questions into them which lead readers to do bits of writing-to-reveal-their-envisioning. We have created a continuum of proficiency, and extrapolated specific skills which need to be developed in order for a reader to envision well. Above all, children need to go from literal to inferential envisioning. They need to not only see whatever the words of the story explicitly say, but to also see what those words suggest. This involves bringing their own experiences to bear, filling in the gaps of the text. If you are clear that most of your children are reading in a literal fashion, then you may decide that in this unit, you will be helping them develop more inferential envisionments. To do this, you will need to teach them to draw on prior knowledge (which could be extra challenging when reading fantasy books because they have NOT been in places like these.) You need to teach them to read between the lines, letting bits of precise information convey more than meets the eye. If the text says, “The sun was peeking over the horizon as I...” then the proficient reader not only sees the sun, this reader also knows it is morning and hears the morning sounds. Children may be hesitant to fill-in-the-gaps as they read fantasy stories because these worlds and characters are products of the author’s imagination, but you can help them to realize their will be internal consistencies within the text. If the boys all have flatheads and a new character—a male—appears on the scene, the skilled reader gives that male character the requisite flathead.

Of course, you may decide to focus on reading skills other than envisionment. For example, you can use this unit as an opportunity to revisit the content you taught in October’s unit on character, only this time doing so in a fashion which helps readers

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integrate and synthesize all the elements of the story in order to understand the reasons *why* characters act as they do. That is, you could spotlight the fact that as good readers we know our characters and the world they live in so well that we understand why characters act as they do, even if we do not always agree with their decisions. Such a unit could support the skills of inference, synthesis and prediction (if we understand why our characters act as they do, inferring causes and effects, then we can use this to help us make truly informed predictions.) The unit would be challenging because readers of fantasy can't simply rely on our own personal responses and on empathy in order to understand why characters act as they do—the characters in a fantasy story live by the rules and values of another world. To understand the character's decisions, a reader needs to ask, "What rules do these characters live by? How are the 'rules' of this culture different than (and similar) to those of my culture?" Readers might want to ask, "Who has power in this world?" This work can flourish if children are reading across a series, as new characters enter a world the reader is already familiar with.

You could, of course, forward entirely different skills. You could use this as a time to teach readers to respond personally to the stories they read, and to use personal responses as the starting point towards reading with empathy and towards prediction. If you made this choice, you would help readers understand that although the worlds in their stories are different than our worlds, there are lots of ways in which characters are similar to us. Even though the world of the story is fantastic, children can still discuss how they identify with the characters' traits, problems, and motivations. While the situations may not be ones students have experienced, the situations are often parallel on some level.

Fantasy stories are often confusing. Time travel can be confusing. The use of different perspectives can be confusing. You may want to teach this unit with an emphasis on the importance of reading for sense and of monitoring for confusion. You may want to teach children that they carry with them a tool kit of strategies (such as rereading, talking with other readers, reading on with a question in mind) for responding to confusion.

No matter how you decide to angle this unit, it will help you to know a bit about fantasy. Just be careful to use this information sparingly, following the 'Add flour slowly, stirring all the while' advice. If this is your children's first experience in a fantasy unit of study, it is probably enough for most of them to know that in fantasy stories, there are good guys and bad guys. On the other hand, if children have studied fantasy before and you want to make it seem like this will be an All-New and Advanced fantasy unit, you may want to sprinkle in an extra dash of terminology.

Depending on the skills you decide to highlight, your reading aloud might be interspersed with turn-and-talk prompts such as these:

- "The setting in this book is so unusual! I'm trying to get a picture in my mind, but it is confusing. Let me see....what do I picture? Umm...Turn and tell each other about what picture you have in your mind."

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- “He seems to be our hero, and I ‘m thinking he might be a good hero. Ummm...Let me think what qualities make me think that...Ummm...Turn and tell each other what you are thinking?”
- “So we’ve noticed that there’s a battle going on between good and evil. I’m trying to think what’s going to happen pretty soon. Ummm...Turn and tell your partner what you are thinking.”
- “There are a few secondary characters. I know we read to think about the roles they’re playing? Why is X in this story anyway?”
- “This part seems really confusing... turn and talk to your partner about what’s going on? Turn and talk.”

Mystery: Inference, Close Reading, Synthesis, Prediction

This is a wonderful, straightforward unit, and the reason the unit works so well is that it is totally natural for readers of mysteries to be engaged in one gigantic enterprise. That is, it is totally natural for readers of mysteries to try to solve the mystery before the crime solver does. This one sentence is easy to say—but actually accomplishing this goal is as complex as all of reading. To do this, mystery readers need, above all, to be attentive and constructive readers. Mystery readers need to be close readers and need also to be the opposite—that is, we need to be readers who can pull back to think about the details we are accumulating and make something of them—a hunch, a suspicion, a prediction.

So one great thing about this unit is that the books themselves provide a through-line for the unit, a trajectory for readers to follow, a rallying cry which can create the momentum in the unit.

There are other advantages. First, in this unit more than in many others, there are lots of books for readers at diverse (and early) levels. Granted, we are not aware of mysteries that are easier than *Nate the Great* and *Cam Jansen*, but there certainly are lots of mysteries for readers at levels M, N, and O....as well as lots of mysteries that you and I love to read.

Then, too, (if you wish to do so) there are lots of television shows that can be used as touchstone texts. You may want to bring in an episode of *Monk* (or whatever show you and your kids like) and then use that episode as a touchstone, referencing it often in minilessons. Most of the skills that you will want to teach readers in this unit are skills that can be illustrated with reference to any episode of *Monk*. Similarly, you may want to purchase the old-fashioned game of *Clue* and to use that as a touchstone. You can teach readers that just as they needed to keep track of all the possible suspects when playing *Clue*, so too, readers of mysteries do this as well. We have little lists going in our mind, and when we learn new facts, we look back on those lists, sometimes eliminating one suspect or another.

You will also find that there are real-life mysteries in any classroom. Where did the hamster go? Where did I leave my glasses? You can use even just the tiniest of mysteries to convey that readers of mysteries first determine what the mystery is, and

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then we all become detectives, gathering clues and speculating what those clues might suggest. You will certainly not want to delay conveying to children that this is the central work of the unit, and helping them all get on-about this larger enterprise.

Over the course of the unit, you will revisit this concept to provide more detailed help, but don't postpone inviting kids into the central work of the unit.

You are apt to find that your children experienced a mystery unit in the preceding year, that means you'll need to invent ways to make your version fresh and new. If your children are recycling through the unit, be sure to clump together stuff they have already learned—don't parse out every little detail if you are simply reviewing what they already learned. For example, if your class is re-visiting mysteries for a second or third time, you might start the unit by recruiting children to help you solve a real-life mystery ("Before we can start this minilessons, will you help me figure out what I did with my glasses? Let me think, where did I last have them...?") If the class helps you tackle that mystery, you can use this to say "You already know a whole lot about solving mysteries. Would you list across your fingers three things that we did right now to solve the mysteries of my lost glasses—three things that mystery readers do all the time?" You can then say, "I heard you say that I first sensed something was wrong and realized my glasses were missing....and mystery solvers do this. We first figure out what the mystery is! Then we became detectives, searching for clues, replaying what the main character did. We became suspicious, slowed down, investigating more closely." The teaching point in this minilessons could be, "Today I want to remind you that whenever we start a book, it helps to think, 'What kind of book is this?' and to remember all we already know about how that kind-of-book tends to go, using this to help us be powerful readers."

If you start your mystery unit by reminding children of all that they know about how mysteries tend to go and the ways that mystery readers need to read, you may soon want to remind children that mysteries are also stories, and that they also need to draw on everything they know as readers of fiction. Most importantly, they need to grow ideas about characters. This, of course, becomes a way to help mystery readers realize that collecting clues and using these to grow theories is not just what one does to solve a crime....it is what one does to grow ideas about characters, too. When reading any novel, for example, we collect clues in order to think, "What kind of person is this?" and then we devise tentative hunches which we consequentially add to or revise.

You could progress into teaching readers that whether they are collecting 'who-dun-it' clues or clues about the sorts of people these characters are, they use those clues to predict. A weatherman uses clues to predict the weather, a fortune teller reads the lines on a person's hand to predict what that person's life will hold....Readers are like, and also unlike, weathermen and fortune tellers. Readers predictions, like a weatherman's predictions, are based on detailed facts about what has already gone on. But unlike the weatherman, readers don't sum up our predictions in a single phrase ('cloudy'.)

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Then, too, you could teach children that good readers often entertain more than one possible prediction.

My point is not to suggest that this is the pathway you must follow in your mystery unit, but only to say that if children have already experienced the unit, you can't devote one minilesson to teaching readers that mysteries contain a crime solver, and one lesson to the idea that mystery readers read suspiciously. If your students have studied mysteries before, your teaching will remind them of all they know, and then your focus will be on whatever reading skills you decide to forward.

Certainly part of this might involve teaching readers to read more closely. Every time I watch *Monk*, I'm dazzled by the way he spots details which turn out to be significant. I see the same things he sees, but I just pass by so many significant details. Great detectives are on the alert, seeing more and noticing more than the average person. We can use this to teach children the importance of reading more closely, with more alertness. Clubs can reread closely, trying to spot additional clues they may have missed the first time.

Skilled mystery readers not only search for clues, they also make something of those clues using inference to do so. Phrases such as "I think this suggests..." "I think this means..." are the language of prediction and inference. We can teach students to point to particular parts of the mystery, to infer and predict by saying, "Because of this... I think ..." These predictions are based on the inferences they accumulate from the text.

Among other things, skilled mystery readers make mental, if not physical, lists of suspects. As they're reading, they're on the lookout for information or behavior that seems out of place, and discrepancies pose opportunities to ask questions such as, "Why would ..." or "How could...?"

Of course, this unit also invites instruction on inter-textuality. As children read one mystery, and then another, they will develop a sense for how mysteries tend to go, and if they are reading mysteries within a series, they'll get a sense for this particular series. All of this means that children can, within this unit, makes lots of progress learning to synthesize. They not only read from chapter to chapter, figuring out how one chapter synthesizing fits with the ones before it, they also read from book to book, synthesizing.

In turn-and-talk you might say something like:

- "That's weird! Let's reread, paying close attention to the description of this character." Then, "Turn and tell your partner what's so weird."
- "Oh my gosh—I think that's a clue! Turn and talk— what clue do we have and what might that mean?"
- "Let's figure out what's really going on: Partner A, be Jigsaw and Partner B, be Mila. Act out this scene...Now talk about what's *really* going on."

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- “This changes everything! Now who do you think did it?”
- “How does this part fit with your theory of who did it?”

Adventure: Personal Response, Envisionment, and Prediction

In an adventure study, because of the strong human emotions these books tackle—such as fear, frustration, persistence, bravery, and triumph—you may choose to work with your readers on personal response. Personal responses may first take the form of reactions to the text, which will often sound like children commenting on what has happened like, “That’s horrible” or “I’m so worried.” Teach children to value the places that drew them in, and to ponder why they reacted the way they did.

Club members can mark these sections where they had strong reactions and then talk about what happened and why they reacted so strongly. While reading *Hatchet* a student may start out by saying, “I can’t believe Brian is going to eat more of the berries that made him so sick!” You can then teach the club to look back at the event and uncover why the character acted as he did. Readers can think if they were in the same situation what would they do and then consider how that is the same or different from what the character has done. The club’s conversation might center around trying to explain the differences.

Envisionment then becomes a powerful tool for adventure clubs to imagine the character’s challenges and options. Proficient readers will reread that section of the text and see Brian, clutching his stomach, crying at the rivers edge. They will look around and see the only food is the pile of berries he collected. Club members might think about times in their life when they felt similar ways and try to vividly recall those moments. Some might remember a time they were ill, how they were repelled by the smell of any food, some might even grab their stomachs and hold their foreheads as they talk about how they never wanted to feel so terrible again. They may ask their club with conviction, “Why would he do that?” Teach clubs to take those questions head-on and imagine several possibilities, saying “well maybe it’s because this or this or this.” For example, some members might bring up times when they were so hungry they felt that they were willing to eat anything and envision Brian, alone, desperate for food. You can then teach the club to look back at the event and regard it as a window to the character, an opportunity to learn more about the special, internal drives that keep them going.

Naturally, then, our readers will also benefit from work with prediction, folding in what we have learned about the character and what objects or people are at the character’s disposal. For example, they might use their knowledge of Brian’s ability to problem solve and the realization that he used what he had in order to survive to make predictions about how he will act when future troubles arise.

During this adventure study, students learn to ask the key questions about this genre. Specifically, you might lead them to ask: “What are the natural resources and dangers of this place?” “What objects do the characters possess that they can draw on?” “What special skills or talents empower the characters?” “How and why do the

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secondary characters help or hinder the journey?” “What lessons or insights do the characters gain about themselves and the world?”

In turn-and-talk you might say something like:

- “How was she able to think like that? I just wonder what makes her act differently than I would. Turn and talk with your club about what makes her similar or different from you.”
- “Wow, I know just how she’s feeling! Tell your partner about a time you’ve felt that way.”
- “The way the author describes the setting in that part just makes me feel like I’m there, right on the ledge! Let’s reread that part and then turn and talk with your club about everything that you’re picturing.”
- “Hey, I think I know what he’s going to do next! Quick, predict with your partner what he’s going to do!”
- “I’m shocked! Stop and jot about what you’re thinking right now.”

Series: Monitoring for Sense, Inferring, Intertextuality (Text-to-Text Connections), Reading with an Awareness of Author’s Craft, Cause and Effect

If you teach many struggling readers, finding genre books that match your readers may be a challenge. If this is the case, a series study may be a good option—although we recognize this unit isn’t technically a genre. Ideally, by this time of year your children will have progressed to significantly harder texts. You may want to do some small-group guided reading sessions to introduce groups of children to a new series that might otherwise be a tiny bit of a stretch for them. These guided reading sessions can focus on a particular skill, such as inferring or cause and effect, and set up the group to keep using that skill.

In this unit, one goal is to re-teach children everything you taught earlier—only this time to teach children to draw on this growing repertoire of skills and habits as they read books which are a little more challenging. (They should still be reading books they can read with accuracy and comprehension). A second goal is to teach children to read with wide-awake minds, noticing all sorts of things in their books and growing important ideas as a result of their reading. This will also be a time to teach readers that it is smart work to reread a text, scrutinizing it carefully. You may choose to teach students not only to monitor for sense in a book, but to use what they know from one book in a series to help them monitor for sense in another book in the series. Clubs should be reading to look for connections across the texts. Once a club member brings up an idea, the other members may decide to reread the section to gain further insight into the idea, and look for supporting or conflicting evidence.

When students write texts that support or disprove an idea, you may want to teach clubs how to cite the text to work on a specific reading skill. If a club needs to work on fluency, they may reread the part a few times, making it sound smoother and with more varied intonation. They may even pick parts and do a dramatic read before discussing how a part fits or doesn’t fit with the ideas. If a club needs work on envisionment, they may cite the text by reading a snippet, stopping to picture what

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they read, then reading on a little more and adding to their picture before discussing how it fits.

In turn-and-talk, you might say something like:

- “Hey, I know someone just like this from my reading earlier in the year. Turn and tell your partner who this character reminds you of.”
- “Hmmm...I think the character has acted like this before. Turn and talk about those parts with your partner.”
- “I’m shocked – I can’t believe what just happened! Turn and talk about what happened and who caused it to happen.”
- “Well, I know how the main character is feeling. But I really wonder how the other characters are feeling? Stop and jot.”

Unit 6 - Talking and Writing About Texts To Infer and Interpret: Same-Book Partners or Clubs to Support Deeper Reading

March

This unit has reappeared in various formats over the years. It was once described in Chapter 18 and 23 of *The Art of Teaching Reading*. Similar work informed Unit 3 in the TCRWP’s binder of minilessons, distributed several years ago. Many of these ideas are addressed in Santman’s *Shades of Meaning*. At one point, the teaching described in this unit influenced work with short shared texts, but we’ve since decided that asking students to pore over short texts has less pay-off than encouraging them to read longer and richer books. These old iterations of this work can inform you and your colleagues as you plan this incredibly important unit of study.

The unit’s purpose is to teach readers to compose meaning. It’s all too easy to let our eyes fly past a text, to follow the story-line until the last page, then to put down the text and move on. This unit helps readers read closely and constructively, using the tools of writing and talking to find layers and layers of significance. We hope this unit helps children to pause in their reading and to think, “What is this really, *really* about?”

The Main Work of the Unit

In order for children to understand what it means to interpret, you will probably want to take them back to the time in the writing workshop when you taught them that writers can write about one event in order to highlight different meanings. A youngster could, for example, write about a ride on a Ferris wheel in a way that suggests that even though he’s almost a teenager, he still holds tight to childhood pleasures. Alternatively, he could write about that same ride in ways that show that whenever he’s in a crowd, he looks for ways to be alone. In the writing workshop, children will have learned that in order to highlight a meaning, the writer elaborates on sections of the story that feel essential, and makes sure that the beginning and the ending of the story fit with the real meaning.

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Now tables will be turned and children will be reading and thinking, “What is this story *really* about?” Children will want to keep in mind that writers tell a story in a particular way for a reason. It is not an accident that the writer names her characters as she does, begins the story as she does, or places the story in this particular setting. Children will want to read thinking about the relationships between an author’s choices and the text’s real meaning. They’ll ask, “If that’s the real meaning in this story, then why did the author start the story this way? Stretch out this part? Include this section?”

A word of caution: When you and I were in high school, many of us studied with teachers who believed each story ‘had’ a theme, and that it was the teacher’s job to elicit the correct theme from students. These days, most educators recognize that there is no one theme in a story, and that different readers will construct different understandings of a story’s meaning and significance. These interpretations, however, all need to be grounded in the text. A reader may fruitfully think, “If this *is* a major message in this book, how come the author titles the text this way? Begins it this way? Includes this section?”

Practical Decisions: What to Read?

Whereas other units place specific demands on the nature of the books that children are reading, this unit does not do so. A unit on fantasy book clubs requires that readers read fantasy books. A unit on interpretation and inference, however, does not make such demands. It is, however, important for children to work with shared texts (with all members of the partnership or the club reading the same book in sync with each other.) It is also very helpful (even perhaps crucial) for children to read well-written texts. That is, this unit asks readers to look at the decisions a writer has made as he or she crafts a text, asking, “Why did the author decide to do this?” and “How does this decision help to forward the meaning?,” the questions will pay off more if the text is well-written in the first place.

Of course, it will be crucial in this unit, as in all units, for children to read lots of books. You’ll expect children who are reading lower-level chapter books to read five a week, and children who are reading denser and more challenging texts to read at least one a week. This rate of progress through books does not, allow for a lot of deep discussion so you may decide that children inch through a shared book, talking every few chapters, and meanwhile read other single-copies of books independently, looking for similar stuff as they gallop through those books.

You may want to help children choose books that you believe will especially pay off, and cluster books together in provocative ways. Perhaps one club of children will read “Journey” books, and another, “Life-lessons” or “Surprising teacher books.” Perhaps you want to imagine this unit as author studies, inviting one group of children to read a collection of books by Gary Paulsen, another, a collection by Jacqueline Woodson. If you do create small text-sets of books that might ignite sparks when rubbed against one another, be sure to suggest that once readers begin this work, they expand on those text-sets, finding their own books that speak to each

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other. In any case, you will want to encourage readers to see connections between the books they read, carrying all that they have already read as a club to the current book. Someone once said that the mark of a good conversation rests on the number of other books and other book-talks that a conversation references. This may be an overstatement, but it is true that when a richly literate person reads any one book, we often make links to other texts, other conversations, other life issues....and these links keep us from maintaining too narrow a focus. Connections across books can lead readers to develop new insights, to see more possibilities and to revise our thinking. The skill of reading across texts has a name: intertextuality.

Writing and Talking to Support Inference and Interpretation

You may start the unit by inviting children to read and jot their thoughts as they read. Then show them that we, as teachers, sometimes look back on our own reading and ask, “What sort of thinking do I tend to do as I read?” This sort of reader-study can yield insights about ourselves. Some readers are apt to read thinking, “I love the way the author wrote that!” Others are apt to read thinking, “Why did the character do that?” Most of us have a repertoire of ways we respond to texts; that repertoire will be different from one reader to another. One way to enrich our reading is to take on a lens that we don’t often use as we read.

Another way to enrich children’s reading is to teach them that writing can literally be a tool for hands-on-thinking. This requires that children learn to free-write, or to write without having pre-determined what they are going to say. If your children write when they’re reading, it’s likely that they read, have a thought, then hold that thought still for a moment, and then record the “frozen” thought. It is likely that writing, for your readers, is a way for them to record ideas they have already formed. It is extraordinarily powerful to teach children that writing can also be a way to extend ideas; this means that after recording a thought, we continue to write more. It can be fruitful for the writer to finish recording a thought and then to push himself or herself by writing, “Furthermore...”, and then continuing writing and thinking. Sometimes writers will want to shift toward thinking—and writing—in ways that address the question, “So?” or “Why is this important?” Teach children to ask questions as they are writing, and then to take on those questions, as they write brand new dawning ideas, using writing to explore tentative answers.

You will probably find that when readers read, they have quick, underdeveloped thoughts about their reading. When encouraged to say more, instead of staying longer at the idea-level, they will probably elaborate simply by providing examples of the thought. In a unit on inference and interpretation, your goal will be, in part, to teach readers to snowball their thoughts about reading. You will want to teach readers to stay with an idea.

Reread the description about writing-in-response-to-reading which was included in the second half of the October writings. If you did not launch readers’ notebooks then, you may want to do so now. In general, once kids are writing really provocative post-its, it can help them to generate theory charts (making their own very informal

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and quick graphic organizers, tailored to whatever idea the child is on-about.) Once children can carry theory charts with them as they progress through books, and do so in ways that develop (not close down) thinking, they tend to profit from the invitation to keep readers notebooks—but only if the emphasis is not on *writing* well, but on *reading* well, and *thinking* well (while writing quickly).

In any case, teach kids to grow ideas as they read (more on this later), and then to continue to grow ideas as they talk about their hunches and thoughts. When you teach readers to interpret, you are teaching them to develop hunches about aspects of the text that may turn out to be important to its larger meaning. You can teach students to keep track of their ideas on post-its or in entries and to then examine the notes in search of larger ideas and themes. For example, you may teach students to take their post-its and put them into categories. Then clubs can talk by connecting the ideas on one post-it to the next. Smaller ideas and hunches can lead to big ideas and interpretations. For more ideas, see chapter 18 in *The Art of Teaching Reading*.

You may suggest club members keep post-its that made for good book-club conversations in an envelope (or that they list these on a chart, referencing pages in a reading notebook). Then, after the children read and get deeper into the book, they can take any current conversation and lay that conversation next to an earlier one. Physically, they can do this by simply putting those previous post-its or entries at the center of a new conversation. They can also by lay an earlier section of the novel alongside a later one. When children talk between their two sets of insights, they develop new and often more powerful ideas. So if today the club talking about *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, notices that each character is dealing with loss, this club might then try to relate this thought with the earlier observation, that Caleb relies on Anna. That is, these children would wrestle over how the observation that Caleb relies on Anna fits with their sense that characters in this book are dealing with loss. Similarly, if the club talks one day about the fact that Sarah seems to be trying to fit into her new family, they can again ask, ‘How does that go with the idea of loss?’ When children synthesize multiple ideas and parts of the text, they will develop bigger thoughts.

Additional strategies to support interpretation include sketching an image that stands for the whole book so far; underlining the most important word or phrase in the whole text; and thinking or writing notebook entries about such questions as:

- What is this story *really* about?
- What does this story say about the world?
- What do I think the author is trying to say?
- Whose story is being told?
- What are the big ideas I have been identifying so far?
- What parts of the book do not fit with those ideas?
- If an idea is an umbrella, what parts of the book stick out and get wet?
- What are the ideas that are almost big enough to hold this entire book under them, with nothing sticking out?

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- If the author has written his or her point in ten words instead of all these thousands of words, what would it have said?
- What is the lesson from this book that fits not just this story but also lots of other ones? and my life?

If you'd like to also show children how to read their texts with a critical lens and you are not caving this work for another unit (which is likely,) you can teach them a few of the questions, listed below:

Whose voice is heard?

- Whose voice is missing?
- Whose story is it? Who benefits from it being told this way?
- Who has power in the text? Why does he/she have it?
- What social norms do we see in the text?
- What values are upheld in this text?
- What values are challenged in this text?
- What perspective does this text offer on an issue or experience?
- What experience does this text describe which we may be unfamiliar with?

Whether you teach only interpretation or extend this and also teach critical reading, you are helping children to think about the lessons characters learn, and that we as readers can learn from texts. If you'd like to extend this, you might ask your readers to think, "How can I live differently because this book has been part of my life?"

Unit 7 – Social Issue Clubs

April

In a reading workshop, readers read, talk, think, reread and sometimes write about texts over and over. As children do this work, they draw on and extend every reading skill in their repertoires. We as teachers plan a curriculum that helps children feel as if there are seasons to their reading lives. We plan for novelty and continuity.

One of the most exciting sources of novelty for children is the opportunity to gather with friends and a pile of texts in order to read, talk and think deeply about an issue of gigantic importance. All of us know that sometimes, when we read a wonderful book, we find ourselves welling up with a passionate commitment to everything we believe in. Stories can remind us that we care very much about justice, and about living lives of meaning and significance. This unit relies on books engendering this sense of passion. Of course, when embarking on a study of the issues that affect us the most, we must hold close to the reading work that has come before, reminding readers to hold close to their characters and enter the world of the story, inferring along the way to fill in the gaps of the story.

Bridge to Terabithia, for example, may not usually be thought of as a book about a bully; yet the story contains people and moments that elucidate that topic, and if

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children were gathered around this issue, they could use this book to fuel their thoughts and garner insights on bullying. For someone who is intent on learning about bullying, half the fairy tales in the world can be seen as exposés on that topic! A word of caution: you might find that if a student is intent on reading a text through a limited lens of one specific social issue (such as bullying) that child's reading might become limited. The reader might not, for example, pay close attention to character, and may forget to consider story elements (etc.) as he or she reads. It is important to make sure that students are holding onto all that they've learned as they read, adding a new lens to their repertoire.

Organizing the Unit

It's often helpful to think first about the logistics of a unit. If you decide to teach a unit on social issues, you'll probably need to organize small stacks of texts that are on a particular level and address a particular issue that is important to your children. Decide whether you want children to read only chapter books in this unit; we suggest instead that a stack of texts on a topic include a nonfiction article, a picture book, and a poem or two. You'll need to decide how important it is to you that your readers, during this unit, are reading from multiple copies of books. It's conceivable, though not ideal, that children will read different texts but with a shared lens. Finally, you might decide to include two sets of matched-level partners in this unit, with the partners reading shared texts but the group as a whole containing children who read different levels of books and talk across them.

This write-up will describe one way social issue clubs might unroll in your classroom; but of course you will need to consider and make your own choices.

You might look over your library and form baskets of mixed-genre, somewhat leveled texts that could be regarded as addressing an issue. For example, you might have a basket of level J-K books on the pressures people feel to fit in, and another basket of M-O books that also address this. You might have another basket or two on how people with more power treat people with less power. You could also have a basket on the way in which money, or lack of money, affects peoples' lives. You will probably have at least one basket addressing gender or race biases. There are, of course, many more issues you could imagine. There is also the continual danger that books will then be labeled "bullying books" and that your students will forget to read a story through multiple lenses. You may want to create a basket on multiple levels that is simply labeled "important issues" and allow a particularly strong club to find and articulate the issues in these texts themselves.

We suggest you deliberately make your collections very small—no more than three books and some short texts—so there's lots of room for children to add to them. If you don't classify the books your children know best, it becomes something they can do. You might gather the children and give them a pep talk on this unit, showing them some of the baskets you've already collected, asking for their advice on others that could be made. You may need to teach your students by discussing directly the issues they're studying. You may want to consult *For A Better World: Reading and Writing for Social Action* by Randy and Katherine Bomer. Then ask children to write you a

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note highlighting the issues of particular interest to them; using their input and your own judgment, convene reading clubs around social-issue book collections.

You will probably want to have one issue and one basket for the whole class to study together through the read-aloud and minilessons. Sometimes teachers choose to convene the class around the same issue that a group of struggling readers is exploring; this provides support and lots of dignity for those strugglers.

Reading with a Lens

In one of your first minilessons, you'll need to teach children that when they're reading with a particular lens, they can't simply drop all attentiveness to the story as a whole! Instead, they need to balance their attention to the *whole* story with their interest in one specific issue. Help them first read a text or a chapter in order to understand it as a whole, then to revisit and rethink it in order to mine all it has to say. This can be a time to remind students of the importance of monitoring for meaning and for determining importance.

You'll need to teach readers that the author does not need to write BULLYING in big bold letters in order to indicate that this issue lurks within the pages of the text. If your children learned earlier that Naomi Nye was wise to say "Poems hide...", then they can extend that insight now and say, "Issues hide." Within the pages of a text, there are literally dozens of issues for the discerning reader! Authors address issues in subtle ways that allow readers to infer what is really going on.

We suggest you begin by having children read a short text or two that addresses the issue under study, so they quickly develop a head-of-steam on the issue. Once they have read two short texts, teach children to think and talk across texts. How is the perspective of this one text different from that of the other text? What explains the differences? Do the characters within one text or another have the same perspectives on this issue?

You may find that children can read searching for places in the text that fit with bullying or homelessness, but struggle when asked to read with the lenses of power, gender, class, values, voicelessness, democracy, etc. If so, you can help them understand what these mean by having them write or talk about the issues as they relate to their *own* lives. It is probably best if you demonstrate that each of us is a member of many groups—groups which are determined in part by our gender, race, religion, class, etc., but also by our hobbies, our professions. We can talk about how a group-identity shapes us. How does your position as, say, a Latina woman, a fifth grade teacher affect your response to today's headlines in the newspaper? Ask children to think about what groups *they* belong to and how those groups shape who they are and how they think.

One way to scaffold children to think critically is to ask them to think, write and talk about gender or race or class before you read a story that has one of these at the core of the book. For example, you may get children to write or talk about what they think

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it means to be a boy. How are boys perceived? What pressures do boys have? How do boys think or behave? Then read, *Oliver Button is a Sissy* by Tomie dePaola or *The Sissy Duckling* by Harvey Fierstein. When reading aloud you'll want to prompt the children to move between their ideas and the ideas in the story. This will help children spend time thinking about who they are, what they believe and what they care deeply about so they read carrying those lenses. You might also push your students to dig deeper into these issues by asking, "Does the way this story talks about gender (for example) ring true for me?" As students answer this question, they will want to examine why the text reflects or does not reflect their experiences of these issues. They can question what the values are that this text espouses. This can allow students to move between reading and thinking about the sort of world they want to live in.

If you want to emphasize in this unit reading with a critical lens, could revisit the questions you raised in the Interpretation Unit (the previous unit):

- Whose voice is heard?
- Whose voice is missing?
- Whose story is it? Who benefits from it being told this way?
- Who has power in the text? Why does he/she have it?
- What social norms do we see in the text?
- What values are upheld in this text?
- What values are challenged in this text?
- What perspective does this text offer on an issue or experience?
- What experience does this text describe which we may be unfamiliar with?

Ideally, children who are reading about a social issue will become fired up, and begin to see that issue everywhere in their lives as well as in texts. This provides more teaching opportunities; you can help children see their own lives almost as other texts, laid out on the table alongside the texts of other authors. Ultimately, you want children to be able to troubleshoot these issues, understanding their complexities and why they are not so simple to solve. Reading across texts and looking at their own lives as backdrops to their reading work will help students see that the social issues characters face have multiple perspectives and multiple causes, some of which are not what they seem.

After clubs have read texts around a particular issue for two weeks, you may opt to invite them to share their issues with other clubs in the class; then a club of readers might decide to take on a second lens. For example, if a club has been reading and thinking about prejudice in texts, they might then decide to think about homelessness. After taking on the new lens, the club might scan through the texts they've already read, asking, "How does this text address the new issue?" Then they could continue reading, this time thinking not only about prejudice but also about homelessness—and ultimately about the relationships between these two social issues.

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Of course, as you lead this unit, your read-aloud will be angled to support the work. You might ask yourself questions such as, “Who are the characters here and what issues are they facing?” “What are the characters’ reactions to these issues?” “How do the characters deal with these issues?” “What perspective does each character have on this issue?” “If the perspective is different, what explains the difference?”

In your read aloud work, you will also anticipate and address the challenges you expect your book clubs to face in their reading. Most likely, you will need to teach students to infer how the author addresses the many social issues in subtle ways. That is, instead of hunting for a place in the text where the narrator sums up a character’s position on an issue (which, of course, isn’t likely to exist!), show students how you draw on various reading skills to identify the issues lurking beneath the surface of the story. For example, at the beginning of Eve Bunting’s *Your Move*, when James mentions, “now that Dad’s gone,” his little brother, Isaac, watches him closely and imitates him. This would be a good place to pause in your reading and think aloud, “I’m thinking about this: that Isaac used to look up to his dad, but now that his dad is gone, he is looking up to James. James doesn’t tell us how it feels to have Isaac’s eyes always on him, and he doesn’t tell us why his father isn’t around or if he misses him. These are points worth wondering about, but I can also try to name James’s experience as a social issue: What is affecting James and his brother that might also affect lots of other people in our world? For one thing, the social issue of having an absent parent...and the reasons children lose parents...plus, there is the social issue of parenting responsibilities falling on the shoulders of older siblings.”

As students begin to infer around the issues in a story, they will also need to learn what to do with the issues they are discovering or tracking in their books. One question we might ask children to consider is what the author might be trying to say about this issue, based on what happens to all of the characters that the issue affects. Students might then ask themselves again whether or not this message rings true for them, and whether or not their values are being reflected in the texts they are reading.

During whole-class conversations around the read-aloud, you might help children see multiple perspectives on the issue at hand, and encourage children to think, “Is this fair?” Children will tend to produce strident answers; you’ll want to encourage tentative, thoughtful thinking by encouraging them to use phrases such as, “On the other hand...” or “But...” or “Could it be that...” or “Maybe it’s because...”

Unit 8 – Content-Area Reading or A Return to Genre Clubs

May

Content Area

This unit provides children with opportunities to read non-fiction texts around a shared content-area study. It also gives them a chance to hone the strategies for reading non-fiction texts they learned earlier in the year. The goal for this study is not just to help students build their knowledge of a particular content area—such as geography or the living environment—but also to help them acquire tools and

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strategies specific for texts particular to that content area. Students engaged in a study of the governments of North and South America may learn strategies for reading primary source documents—for example, constitutional amendments—and build a cache of vocabulary.

To foster their prior knowledge in a content area, it may also be helpful to link concrete experiences with their reading; students who study geology may first observe different kinds of rocks, then look them up in books to find out more. They might then spend more time with different kinds of detailed maps, expository articles, and scientific terminology. This is also a good time to practice and reinforce decoding skills with content-specific terminology. In any case, you will want to situate them as learners of a content area by fortifying them with the strategies and muscles they need for reading in that content area. Therefore, it will be important for you to assess in order to determine the strategy work you taught during unit 3 that your students still need. Plan this unit so that you concentrate on those non fiction reading strategies.

Students will learn about a topic through reading, talking, watching films, and accessing information through technology and the like. They will learn that it often helps to get the big picture of a subject first by reading very easy books or watching films that give an overview of the topic. Perhaps they will also learn to skim texts and to make a plan for what they want to study in more depth. In this sense, the unit centers on a particular inquiry—such as “How did immigrants adjust to life in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century?”—so students learn to make purposeful plans for reading. Focusing on selected materials, children will then read and reread in order to learn what a particular text is saying.

When students (or you, in many cases) gather books around a topic, it’s important to make sure there are accessible texts within the topic basket. Once it’s clear which content area you’re studying and your topic baskets are formed, you’ll begin to review strategies for reading to learn. For example, you’ll want to spend some time reteaching them that careful non-fiction (or in this case content-area) readers always try to put what they’ve read into their own words. You can demonstrate by reading a passage from a read-aloud text, then putting the text down and saying, “What the author is saying is that...” Or “What this means is...” It’s important that students learn strategies for articulating what they learn in their own words. Not only will it help them retain information longer, it will also encourage them to internalize what they learn.

Sometimes when children are reading on a topic that wasn’t self-selected they aren’t as interested and become passive readers. Teaching readers to question the text is one way that may help them become more active readers. Some question starters that are helpful to teach are “Why would...? Why did or why didn’t...? How could or How come...?” These will not only help children make sense out of what they are reading but will also drive their reading forward in search of answers.

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You'll want to help students develop ideas and opinions about the texts they read, understanding that all texts are written from a particular perspective and that it's okay and often productive to critique content-area texts by thinking, "What is the author trying to get me to think, feel and know about this subject and who benefits from me thinking this way?" For instance, students might be studying a picture of a painting depicting George Washington crossing the Delaware. He is shown standing with his foot up on the bow of the boat as the boat makes its way through treacherous, icy water. His arm rests on his chest and his chin is pointed towards the horizon. The American flag is behind him flapping in the wind as strong, virile soldiers paddle. Students should be able to look at this painting, put it up against what they've learned and ask themselves, "Does this painting match what I know about the horrible, freezing conditions at Valley Forge? If not, what did the artist want people to think and learn from this painting or who benefits from this depiction of George Washington crossing the Delaware?"

To help students develop meatier ideas, there will be discussions about how to differentiate relevant and useful sources from those less so. You may have to go back and do more work on finding the main idea. You may teach students to think about essential questions as they are reading to help them pay attention to more relevant information. You might find it necessary to re-teach that non fiction authors use certain words to clue the reader into important information, such as "most," "never," "always," "but," "on the other hand," "however," "in addition," "therefore," "few," "often," "many," "instead," and so on.

Students will be encouraged to separate fact from opinion, and to learn new strategies in order to negotiate difficult texts. The writing about reading your children do should encourage them to develop their ideas and opinions; the writing may often look messy and disorganized as students explore their thinking about what they read. One way to spark ideas is to suggest readers pay attention to interesting information or quotes, "writing off from" them. What does that statistic, fact, quote *really* mean? Why is it important? What's interesting about this information?

You may also want students to engage in some role-playing activities, continuing some of the work you did earlier in the year infusing drama with reading, so they gain a broader picture of the events, issues, and experiences around a topic. Students can write scripts for these activities, using their own words to write the dialogue for important figures, all the while developing an understanding of multiple perspectives so they can compare and contrast them.

Meanwhile, the teacher will help to bring out larger conceptual ideas related to the topic, to support students as they draw concepts and ideas from the reading. These concepts may help lead them to synthesize larger over-arching ideas and themes. Here it's useful to teach students to ask different types of questions to deepen their comprehension of content-area texts, such as "How does this information fit with what I already know about this topic?" or "How can I organize this information so I understand how all the details connect?" Students will not only search out significant

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and useful information, but also learn to read *critically*, questioning the meaning and importance of information they discover; they'll compare ideas in one text to those from other texts, learning not only how to make connections across texts but also to find places where they conflict, asking, "Why?" and "From whose perspective?" and "Whose voices are left out?"

In order to help children see the larger conceptual ideas you may want to create parallel scenarios, perhaps modern day ones, that deal with an issue, an event or a text similar to what is being studied. In small discussion groups, readers can mull over what they have read. Teach them to continue mulling things over as they read, asking, "What's going on here?" "What does this resemble?" "What have I learned that can help me understand or explain this?" Teach them to think about different (and sometimes opposing) perspectives. Invite them to think about questions. Students will need to move between the scenario and the reading materials, growing ideas that support their thinking, and also allowing their ideas to change and evolve, as well as revise their thinking. Children will need to apply the larger ideas they've learned to the scenario. Eventually, students can be asked to create their own scenarios that embody what they have studied.

You can also teach students how to formulate their own inquiry-based questions that allow them to delve more deeply into text. As children read across books about a topic, they may also begin to make connections between texts and formulate questions about their topics that spur on new purposes for their reading. You'll want to help them extend their thinking about their topic by having thoughts as they gather information. As a student reads and relates a fact she gleaned from the text, you'll want to teach her to think about the topic with more depth by saying the fact and adding her own thoughts. For example, after reading a chunk of text, a student might say something like, "Hmm. I learned that plants help to cool the earth and provide oxygen for living creatures." What you want to teach the student to do is to say what that makes her think. She may add, "That sounds pretty important. I wonder why people don't take better care of them." What she has done is take a fact from the text and put her own idea or preconception alongside. Another way of doing this is to stretch the idea from the book. That would sound something like, "Plants cool the earth and provide oxygen. Hmm. That means when we clear-cut forests, we're not just affecting the lives of the creatures in the forest. We're affecting the lives of human beings as well." Throughout the unit, there will be a particular emphasis on helping students talk about their findings and their ideas with partners and members of an inquiry group, and to do so in a systematic, logical manner.

Genre Clubs

Earlier in the year, your students had the chance to work in a cycle of genre book clubs. Now children will have the chance for a second round of genre clubs. Presumably, bins of books will cycle between classrooms so the third graders who read mysteries before may be reading adventures now, and vice versa. Either way, the description of this unit will be the same as the one provided for Unit 5.

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Unit 9 – Reading Projects: Building a Reading Life or Authoring Your Own Unit

June

Building A Reading Life

Over the past year, students have been given a variety of reading experiences, and they have undoubtedly grown tremendously as readers. This unit gives them time to savor their experiences, notice their growth and use their reflections as a way to create reading projects for themselves independently. It also gives us as teachers a chance to design our own unit of study, by carefully thinking back on the entire year to best ascertain and address students' growth and ever-present needs.

If you decide to guide all your students through Independent Reading Projects, you may begin the unit by teaching students to look through their reading logs and reading notebooks, asking themselves questions such as, "What types of books do I tend to read?" "Of the books I've read, which are my favorites?" "What genres do I tend to shy away from?" Students will begin seeing patterns across their reading work, which might empower them to say, "I'm the kind of reader who loves to read..." Students might also reflect on their reading lives by recalling significant reading experiences they've had across the year; help them think through the units of study your class has traveled through together. Perhaps they recall a partnership, club or read-aloud conversation in which they developed a huge insight. Or maybe they read a book that touched them so deeply that it changed the way they saw books they'd read previously. You might have students read through their logs and notebooks looking for 'landmark books,' asking the question: "Which books have changed me in some way?"

As readers reflect, they will begin to notice their reading preferences and strengths as well as areas open for further exploration. This data can become a source for planning a reading project. Teach students to begin by gathering books. They might gather books around a favorite author, a nonfiction topic, a genre, an issue or a theme. For example, a student might have loved the class read-aloud, *Skinny Bones* by Barbara Park. He might, therefore, choose to collect other books by this author and create an author study for himself. Or perhaps, during the unit of study on *Social Issue Book Clubs*, a club might have begun reading books about *peer pressure*. For their reading project, some of those students might decide to continue reading more books that focus around this issue. There might be students who have collected lists of books recommended by classmates throughout the year; this is the perfect opportunity for them to gather these books and create a reading project for themselves.

We can make space for students to begin collecting reading materials in the classroom library by providing baskets labeled with the students' projects. This serves as an organizational support for students as well as a vehicle for making projects public: "Who else has a project like mine?" "Who might read with me?" "Who could use this book recommendation?" This will help students form partnerships and clubs around reading projects. After they've learned so much about

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building ideas through conversation, you'll want to encourage them at this point to continue this work independently.

Now that students have gathered materials (and perhaps other readers), they are well into their reading projects. You'll want to teach them to plan their reading, and to make deadlines for themselves. You might give them a blank calendar where they can plan the start date and end date of the reading of the books they've chosen. Show them how to plan the amount of time they'll be reading each day in school and at home, and to decide how many pages they'll be able to read during this time. They'll use this information to set a deadline for their books. Students will also need to plan when they will meet with partners or clubs to discuss their reading. We can teach them to ask themselves (and each other!) questions such as:

- How will my study go?
- What will I do each day? How can I write that on my calendar?
- What will I read? What are my reading goals (skills-based)?
- How will writing support my study?
- When will I spend time reflecting on how my study is going and revise it when needed?
- When will I talk to my classmates about my project and their studies?
- How will I assess my project?

Help them answer these questions and make plans accordingly, as well as guiding them in ways to keep track of their work across the unit of study.

As you can see, this unit is a time for students to think about the skills and strategies they've learned this year, the progress they've made, and the work they can do to continue to strengthen themselves as readers. You might discuss and name the qualities of good reading studied across the year, and students might use these qualities to reflect on themselves as readers. We could pose questions that help students think about specific reading skills such as: "Do you reread when you meet up with confusion? Do you reread to think more deeply about your reading?" Or something more open-ended like: "How do you tend to develop ideas about the books you read?" Students can use these reflections as a way to make plans, then remember to apply particular skills and strategies as they read.

Your conference notes might indicate that there are students in need of work in a particular area; you might pull these students together in small groups to teach strategy lessons that focus on particular reading skills. For example, you may have several students who are working on improving their interpretation skills. They might each bring their reading-project books to the small group and apply the strategy to their independent projects.

Author Your Own Unit

If you decide however to author your own unit of study with your colleagues, you may want to begin by spending some time in conversation about how your students

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have developed across the year. We encourage you to end the year by teaching a unit that you and your colleagues co-author together for your upper-grade readers. Think first about what your students will actually be doing in the unit. Will they read their own texts and design a course of study for themselves, or will they continue their book club work by choosing their own genre to read and talk about together? Think about the muscles you'll want them to use to support this work. For example, you might tell children that the unit of study is in planning your own reading project—but your real goals might be for children to build on their growing reading muscles and skills in order to carry their reading lives into the summer months, and to continue to practice reading skills that need more development.

In every unit, children have developed their reading skills. In every unit, children have developed their ability to think and talk thoughtfully about texts. In this unit, your children might be constructing their own adaptations of past units, or they might be authoring brand new one; but they will be reading with stamina and meaning in whatever they read, and coming prepared to grow their ideas in rich conversations with others. We will support you in thinking about authoring your own units of study; but of course you may fashion other units of study we have yet to imagine.

Regardless of which direction you take, as the unit draws to a close, you might want to plan a reading celebration, so students can share their projects with other readers, giving the community ideas for projects they might pursue in their summer reading. You might have students make booklists with descriptions of their projects, to share with one another, and get into groups and exchange brief book recommendations.

At this point you might want to administer an assessment to see how this unit (and this year) has helped your students grow a stronger sense of their reading identity. They might use the reflective work they did at the beginning of the unit as a starting point to write a short bio that describes the reading journey they've taken across the year. It might look something like this:

When I started fourth grade the only kinds of books I read were adventure books. Anytime my teacher or my reading partner suggested something else, I put up a big fight. I didn't think that any other genre could hold my attention, but I was wrong. This year I learned that there are so many other great genres to read. I particularly love mystery books, and I've recently started to like historical fiction.

I've also learned that talking with other readers is a way to get really interested in books. When you share your ideas with other people, they help you to notice things in your book you wouldn't have noticed reading alone. There was a time when I just wanted to sit with my nose in my book and read, read, read, but now I love to stop and ask other people what they're thinking about. It makes reading so much more fun.

The most significant assessment, however, will be the plans that readers carry off with them into summer vacation. Our biggest hope for this unit is that students will head into summer with plans for reading. All end-of-the-year conversations and

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celebrations should support this excitement. You might want to give them some time to plan the books they'd like to read over the summer; they could fill in calendars for July and August thinking about how and when they'll make time for reading the books they've chosen. They might also compare the books they plan to read with their classmates' choices, and try to incorporate a day into their schedules when they can get together to discuss their selections. This work will help our readers build a strong sense of who they are as readers, and build rich independent reading lives.